The Alchemical *Coniunctio* of Individuation:

Inner Change during a Ph.D. Program As Seen Through Dreams

By Marie Judson-Rosier

August 21, 2015

Committee

Chair: Dr. Laurel McCabe

Dr. Judy Radiloff

Chair: Dr. Laurel McCabe

Dr. Judy Radiloff
Abstract

This article’s purpose is to bring understanding of the inner occurrences experienced during life struggle that bring about midlife *coniunctio* of the conscious and unconscious mind. By examining my dreams and journals during a Ph.D. program, years 2000-2007, I attempt to elucidate a shift of psyche. In this narrative study which explores a set of dreams selected from over 200, I sketch an arc of change, from the grip of *father* or *patriarchal complex* toward new consciousness and balance of inner feminine and masculine, while demonstrating the essential role of spiritual and inner work practices.
Introduction

This article’s purpose is to understand inner occurrences I experienced during a Ph.D. program. The nature of the big dreams of that period led me to stay with depth study of the unconscious for a decade past the time of the dreams. By examining dreams and journals in this narrative study, I attempt to shed light on the process and to share how an inner dream-maker acts as both witness and alchemist in psychic transformation. With the premise that an examination of the dream symbols would affirm essential truths about my psychic journey, I worked through the dreams of my doctoral experience, reflectively, through revising, finding evidence of my soul leading me toward and through a challenging era that broke me to some extent free of a gripping complex. In these pages I depict how my deep Self guided me in the transformative process of individuation and helped me survive the cataclysmic changes inevitably involved in the release.

A Brief Background

I was the youngest of five children in a middle-class, two-parent home, growing up in the South Bay Area of California. That simple-seeming statement hides a volume of complexities: my father grew up in the Pacific Northwest, an only child in a family that included father’s suicide, mother’s financial struggle, a step-father bringing alcoholism and violence. In contrast, my mother grew up well-to-do and cultured, in Southern California, a doctor’s daughter, from missionary stock. My father escaped poverty by joining the navy and they met at university where my father attended officer’s school. The contrast within the marriage inevitably brought a volatile mix to the family dynamic.

As the youngest child, I was buffered from my father’s temper, which he aimed mostly at my brothers. I saw him as boorish and became hyper-vigilant, trying not to draw his attention. I
did not see his quieter side that loved to read and was contemplative. I saw my mother as refined and gracious. I idealized her. She, however, was mostly focused on the males in the family.

We were told, as children, that the oldest two siblings had the high IQs. They were put through university. My father discouraged me from attending college, despite my high grades. When, in adolescence, I asked if I should become a lawyer, he told me I should instead become a secretary. My mother removed herself from any opinion on my future, as though she felt unqualified to have thoughts beyond wife and mother. Though put through university by her parents, she narrowed her frame of reference to family, homemaking and art.

Despite the discouragement, I put myself through university. I was financially responsible for myself from age 17 on, and graduated from UCLA with honors, Magna Cum Laude, as a working student. There I met my husband-to-be. A well-educated man, he discouraged me from plans of graduate school, encouraging me instead to try acting.

These messages from important male figures in my life had an impact on my self-image and self-confidence. Once the drive of getting the degree was complete, I fell under the spell of the early conditioning that marriage and family come first for a woman. Yet scholarship was a deep and abiding aim for me. I married and devoted myself to my husband’s aims until our divorce, when I immediately pursued graduate school, a Masters degree in educational technologies. My first graduate experience provided an exhilarating stretch of my mental faculties, after isolation, with a husband mostly absent once our two children were born. I found the design of interactive, instructional multimedia enlivening. The problem solving, creativity and inventiveness, in a community of fellow graduate students and faculty felt empowering and ignited new hopes and dreams about my possibilities.

I went to work for a technology challenge project in Berkeley schools during the heyday
of educational technology funding, supported by our vice president, Al Gore and found the work richly rewarding, supporting integration of technologies in classrooms grade pre-K through 8th. I was regenerating teachers’ professional lives; in return they showed me warmth, gratitude and appreciation in a community. The blend of hubris and pragmatism, as I felt myself a lifebringing hero, led me to apply for a Ph.D. program, before the technology grant funding ran out. Dissatisfied with the vision of forever performing skills training, I felt a strong drive to reach for another level with a more expansive intellectual challenge.

The Setting of the Narrative Study

I left the work in Berkeley schools for a Ph.D. program at one of the Universities of California, bringing my two young teen children with me and moving into graduate housing near campus at the far end of the state from where they had grown up.

The first two years of the Ph.D. program stretched me in exciting ways, intellectually and philosophically. I felt elated with the sense of growth and new mental prowess, though at times insecure in the environment of the doctoral program. Educated in linguistics on the West Coast, I had never encountered the classic literature of philosophers and political economists we were required to know for our graduate seminars. Yet I was coming to see myself in a new light, able to read and absorb large quantities of dense material. The shift was to an extreme emphasis on male-authored intellectual material, sterile in the sense of empirical, measurable standards that seldom addressed heart, spirit or soul needs. Though tackling and in some ways harnessing competence in the required direction brought a degree of elation, an inner imbalance was building, as I will illustrate in the dream narratives below.

There were three branches to the communication department: social force, culture studies, and educational psychology. Social force and culture studies were the more edgy, critical
and politically oriented segments of the department. My research fell under the educational psychology umbrella, which was the least critical and most conservative branch. Each branch had faculty from diverse academic fields, which did not always speak the same language; the cross-pollination could be dynamic but at times faculty blindly ignored the fact that they understood concepts and terms in very different ways. I explain this because it will underlie some later frustrations and confusions that impacted my dream life.

**Story in Dreams**

*Negative Masculine as Sign of First Movement in the Father Complex*

By the second year of the Ph.D. program, I was working with a female professor from culture studies, helping her to research computer use among young children. This relationship seemed to be going smoothly. One day, however, the professor told me she had denounced my work in the annual evaluative meeting with faculty and would no longer be my adviser; she left the university soon after. The events occurred swiftly and I will not attempt to parse all the contributing factors. I will focus rather on my dream response to them.

The night of the professor’s announcement, which happened to be my father’s birthday (April 18, 2002), I dreamed:

*Dream 1, April 18, 2002: Father Stabbing. An abusive father is stabbing me and my two younger sisters. Piper and I try to sneak our younger sister, who has three stab wounds, to the hospital. I can’t get Piper to focus and help. She keeps playing with mice.*

This dream was the first of the over 200 I recorded in the seven years of the doctoral program. It identifies, I believe, my *father complex* constellated by the professor’s announcement. Complexes are clusters of associations based on early emotionally traumatic and incomprehensible experiences (Jacobi, 1959). Existing in the unconscious, they can arouse
powerful reactions that seem irrational or disproportionate to the circumstance triggering them (Shalit, 2002). Thus, they affect relationships in adult life, and play an essential role in inner growth and transformation.

In this article I identify signs of the father complex that was at work in me as I struggled to thrive in the doctoral environment. Shalit (2002) writes that parental complexes are the most common; parents affect us like powerful gods at a time when we cannot yet comprehend our experiences, in infancy and early childhood. The process of separating our conscious material from our complexes is core to maturation in pursuing life’s journey. An autonomous complex - dissociated from our conscious identity (p. 114) – comes to thrive and gather strength in the shadow, the vast undifferentiated, suppressed, or otherwise inaccessible elements of the unconscious (Jung, 1954/1992). As such it can be crippling, reducing life potential.

The father complex will be variously manifested, according to whether it is a son or a daughter, and according to the personal experience of the father (Jacobi, 1959; Shalit, 2002; Kalsched, 2013). For many women, a silent, dour or melancholic father has a powerful, unconscious impact that can permeate all relationships with a certain kind of scrutinizing negativity (Reis, 1995, p. 52). The melancholy can become ingrained in the daughter as a critical inner voice, Reis writes, where any reassuring alternate viewpoint is lacking. Reis writes that, due to the father complex, a woman can find herself a perpetual daughter – puella aeterna – the eternal girl, “always secretly anxious” (p. 141) and seeking approval. The critical inner gaze attached to the father complex, compounded with collective cultural patriarchy present in the male-dominated institution of the university, lays hold of a woman’s creative work (Reis).

My dream response to the female professor’s deleterious announcement was the stabbing of my inner young girls by an unknown father. He symbolized my sense of the patriarchal
system, of which the professor was the judging representative. Her words manifested in my
dream as a knife attack. As the first experience of the Ph.D. program that I matched with dream
material, I see this as beginning a process of change, starting to break up the complex.

Jung (in Shalit, 2002) saw consciousness as shortsighted and the unconscious as honest
and healing (p. 8). Journal entries allowed me to match what was happening in my waking life
with the dreams that occurred concurrently, allowing me to gather an honest account of my
experience of the Ph.D. program from the honest, unconscious level. My methods for working
with the dreams centered on *amplification*, an exploration of the meaning and interpretation of
dream images drawing on symbols and archetypes found in myths, fairytales, and alchemical
texts (Jung, 1912/1952; 1934/1943). I also found active work with *feeling sense* (Gendlin, 1986),
and other depth methods including collage and dream art to be powerful in revealing depths of
meaning that always need to be verified through a sense of resonance on a soul level (Taylor,
1993).

As to literature, I have drawn particularly on Shalit (2002) on complexes, Reis on the
father complex for women, Kalsched (2013) on soul healing from trauma, and Jung (1944/1968),
Trsimosin (1582/1920), and Edinger (1985) for inner alchemical transformation. Jung became
profoundly involved with the possibilities for depicting psychological transformation through
metaphorical parallels in alchemical processes. The ancients sensed the upheavals in nature and
actions of elements upon each other as apt for imaging the ineffable processes of their own souls
(Edinger, 1985). The medieval ancestors provided potent and poetic expression of these
processes. To summarize (Edinger), first what has become solidified in the personality must be
burned away (*calcinatio*), brought through a death process (*nigredo*), dissolved (*solutio*) and
broken up into smaller bits (*separatio*). Each of these processes allows more purified elements to
ascend and come in contact with the interior gods (*sublimatio*), then descend to join with matter again (*coagulatio*) and ultimately experience joining with the essential and original Self, bringing unconscious matter to consciousness (*coniunctio*). The latter phase Jung (1912/1952) calls *individuation*, whereby more of the deep Self is accessible to the conscious mind. For early alchemists, it would have been the *opus*, the Chalice, or the ultimate aim, fertile foliated earth (Edinger) from which creative work can emerge.

The first alchemical action I identify is in the stabbing dream (*Dream 1, April 18, 2002*). Knives and piercing are classical symbolic dream images for the alchemical process called *separatio* (Edinger, 1985). Trismosin (1582/1920) writes “parts of the earth have become thick, hard and baked … Cracks will be opened … to receive the influence of Fire and Water” (p. 34). My father complex had become thick and hardened, keeping out healing elements. *Separatio*, such as the cracking open that Trismosin describes, must precede further processes, breaking the matter up into smaller parts so that dissolving, burning and distillation may occur (Edinger, 1985).

Kalsched (2013) writes of the divine child in dreams as soul that has become disassociated into shadow in early childhood. He defines *soul* as the vital animating core of our embodied selves, of our subjectivity (p. 10), calling it also the heart, the essence, the core innocence in the person’s spiritual nature. Kalsched also writes that the soul lives between realms – conscious, unconscious and Other – and prefers symbolic expressions of the mytho-poetic psyche. According to Kalsched, the soul allows us an intermediate life between the worlds where we might experience spiritual powers as the *mysterium tremendum*, inspiring awe, beyond the ego in a deeper stratum.

In the dream, the penetration of the knife to a *young girl* aspect my psyche means that
soul might be released to return to consciousness (Kalsched, 2013). Meanwhile the middle sister, a blend with my daughter, would not help to get the wounded youngest sister to a hospital – to be stitched up, anesthetized, fixed. I suspect now that she was closer to the soul imperative to individuate, not to allow the dissociation to continue. She chose instead to focus on playing with mice. Animals in dreams are libidinal instincts (Shalit, 2002); mice might be depicting those instincts that come out to find sustenance at night, while my dream ego – the partial identity of the waking-ego through which we experience dreams (Hall, 1983) – wanted to go back to my old wounded pattern by the knife wounds numbed.

A few weeks after the incident named above, I dreamed (Dream 2, May 7, 2002) of seeing the multimedia drained from a woman’s vagina (see Figure 1). She grows shorter.

Figure 1: “Draining My Multimedia Mojo,” dream.

The dream allows me to see how I felt the loss of stature as well as warmth in a professional community with women who appreciated me, in the Berkeley schools that had preceded the Ph.D. program. The abandonment experience with faculty brought to the fore how much I missed the human and heartfelt role with teachers in Berkeley schools. While helping them overcome their fear of new technologies I was also forming warm, human professional relationships. I had established a midwifing role in the regeneration of these teachers’ professional lives – helping them with a sense of competency in technologies that excited them and reinvigorated their teaching. It was a meaningful role in which I combined my essential
woman-ness – a giving nature – with cognitive and innovative satisfactions. Finding myself, two years into the Ph.D. program, with no equivalent heart-ful exchange, alienated (probably also alienating) in relationships with faculty, my soul felt my yoni drained. Jung (1974/1990) speaks of the yoni as a symbol of femininity drawing from the padma or lotus in India. He points out how early peoples used the phallic and yoni symbols to represent creative mana, the power of healing and potency (p. 105). I felt a diminishment of stature along with an extraction and depletion of my creative juices, i.e., energies, shown in the dream. The dream eloquently depicts the draining of those female energies that I had not consciously acknowledged – I felt sapped of vital energy to translate into my work at the university.

From an alchemical standpoint, the dream depicts solutio, an essential next step in psychic transformation. Solutio is dissolving or drowning. It occurs when we encounter something that feels more powerful than ourselves, creating fear of losing ourselves (Edinger, 1985). In the “Multimedia Mojo” dream the woman’s yoni area is being extracted. Trismosin (1582/1920) writes, “deprive the thing of its Destructive Moisture, and renew it with its own Essential one, which will become its perfection and life” (p. 30) (see Figure 1, above). The affect-laden moisture of the complex (Shalit, 2002) had become destructive; extraction makes space for new life, soul-becoming.

Six months later, my negative masculine (Kast, 2006) appeared again:

Dream 35, Nov. 23, 2002: Brute Dragging Armadillos. A rough, lowlife guy drags armadillos tied behind his beat-up Chevy through a bad city area. I’m livid and yell at him to stop. He jumps out and is about to beat me up. I turn away from him and befriend his disabled, dwarf wife who now stands in a low doorway by the street.

The atmosphere of this dream is unpleasant – the sight of animals being abused, dragged,
scraped, in ugly, abandoned city area, by an infuriating man, a mean low life, was nightmarish. He is angry and hurtful, drives a car fitting his type, in my mind – a beat-up Chevy.

Jung (1974) writes that a vehicle in a dream represents a system or method. My system or method for moving through the Ph.D. program was to try to force creative work from a sterile and compromised environment, where little in my work fed my soul. My alienation from those I worked with brought the judging inner scrutiny of my father complex to the surface. As I demanded productivity from myself, I abused my natural instincts, represented in the dream as armadillos. They get dragged behind the force of my alienating ambitions, as I tried to produce intellectual work without heart or soul anchors. According to Shalit (2002), instincts show up in dreams as animals that contain our human potency (p. 25). Potency is defined as the “inherent capacity for growth and development, potentiality” (American Heritage, 1982). My instincts – my human potency – felt abused, scraped, powerless and self-protective, dragged behind my heedless approach to the university endeavor.

In this dream, I voiced protest. Sparrow (2013) suggests that the dream-ego makes decisions during a dream, in response to emotional content; the direction of the dream, thus, evolves according to the dream ego’s responses. My dream ego turned her energy away from the negative masculine and toward befriending the disabled, dwarf wife – the deformed, undervalued feminine in syzygy with the low life masculine. My feminine principle at that time was being crippled, reduced, as shown also in the previous dream, “Multimedia Mojo.” According to Bolen (1994), within every woman resides the feminine principle, an archetypal feminine - mysteries of the body and the psyche that provide her with a creative, fertile and nourishing natural wisdom. This feminine principle is the soul dimension of being a woman, in kinship with womanhood, nature and animals. In ancient times it was given sacred representation as goddess, in figurines,
temples, altars. Bolen writes that, under patriarchy, the connection giving this principle stature and honor has been suppressed.

With the undermining of the feminine, women encounter themselves in a deficit model, internalized as a negative masculine in many women (Bolen, 1994). Without the connection to her feminine principle, a woman loses the power to draw on her instinctual knowledge and natural authority (p. 70). Therefore Bolen calls for a resacralization – or making sacred again – of the feminine. Bolen likens the need to the tale of the fisher king in which the king sustains a wound that will not heal; as long as the wound is infected, the land is barren. In alchemy, the conscious ego is depicted as a ruler or king. Thus the tale of the fisher king can be likened to an injured ego-Self axis. The ego-Self axis is a connection between Self and ego, between the unconscious and the conscious. Kalsched (2013) writes that the strengthening of the ego-Self axis takes place most powerfully in the mother-child bond; if the mother provides little resonance with her child’s soul expressions, there develops a distorting mirror where the soul finds little purchase and becomes alienated or dissociated from the ego. The ego, according to Jung (1952/1973), is the center of the conscious mind, while the Self is the center and the entirety of our psychic being. Present from the beginning, the Self is always aimed at wholeness and is, in that capacity, the architect of our dreams. In the Fisher King, finding the Holy Grail is the ultimate quest of the knight, Parcival, just as individuation, for Jungians, is a quest toward bringing Self to consciousness, having access to that vital source, greater wholeness.

Bolen (1994) writes that the modern meaning of hero is to develop intolerance for vulnerability, replace feminine qualities with goal-focus. She suggests that the Grail is a symbol of the feminine principle. Kast (2006) suggests that the negative masculine can represent, for a woman, not only her personal father complex, but also the shadow side of patriarchy. The
university system, in patriarchy, leans strongly away from acknowledging the scholar as a whole person: Jung (2009) writes of the sciences being stripped of living meaning (p. 27), of his battle against the establishment that he had internalized, which he described as “old scholars running after recognition, offended if their name is not mentioned… with their great merits and their starved souls” (p. 230).

In the dream, when I turned away from the negative masculine toward the dwarf wife, I believe my dream ego was responding to an imperative from my dream architect – my Self – to give energy to my crippled and reduced feminine principle in order to strengthen my ego-Self axis, demonstrating the compensatory nature of our dreams, seeking psychic balance. My identification with shaming mirrors gave me a false sense of self that took over my relations with the outer world and disconnected me from soul. My unacknowledged complexes were disabling me from true relatedness with other scholars, preventing me from integrating instincts that would allow the development of my personality as a scholar, and to communicate with authenticity, trusting that what I had to say was of interest. My dream-ego decided I needed to feed energy to the feminine. By turning toward my inner disabled dwarfed feminine, I began the process of reanimating “the divine spark of true selfhood” (Kalsched, 2013, p. 163). With the Dragging Armadillos dream, in late 2002, I see signs of a new inner dance beginning. The energy raised by the sight of the defenseless, injured armadillos triggered the father complex, also mobilizing life-producing effect complexes can have, providing a link between the unconscious and the conscious that enables transformation (Shalit, 2002, p. 25).

A dance was beginning, between Eros - feeling or relatedness – and Logos – rational understanding (Shalit, 2002). Though it would not manifest clearly in my progress toward the degree, Shalit writes that Eros softens the ego and relaxes its rigid boundaries. The befriending
of the dwarf at the end of the dream was one step toward compensatory softening, making approachable the rough dominant masculine that was building with my emphasis on intellectual study. The end of the dream hints at an unconscious beginning of my search for the sacred feminine, which I took up in earnest in 2004.

**Emergence of the Sacred Feminine in my Life**

Unaware of my intentions on a conscious level, I joined online discussion groups regarding ancient goddesses two years later. I was also writing papers for my qualifying exam. I spent the online time feeling clandestine. However, the study of goddesses and making the feminine sacred, through myth and ancient practices, fed something deep within me. Soon I was drawn to discussions of how goddess myth related to the psyche as a whole, in modern times. A growing hunger led me to groups that incorporated Jungian dream work and myth as metaphor for use in *inner work*, studying the unconscious with intention toward growth and making conscious the shadow material in order to functioning more ably in our outer lives (Johnson, 1986). I found that the ritual exercises and guided meditations of groups involved with the sacred feminine had strong resonance with inner work approaches. At the same time, I was strongly drawn toward honoring the sacred in nature. For this, I joined online Druid groups and adopted mindful practices, being present for magic in the natural world (Starhawk, 2001). All of this led me to embrace a firm personal philosophy that we can help define our psychic environment with grateful thoughts of abundance and the noticing of small repetitions pulling at soul resonances.

Despite my immersion in psycho-spiritual work, with extensive home application of the principles as well as trips to Los Angeles for classes, workshops and seasonal celebrations, my relationship to university relationships was not significantly changing. In the fourth year of the Ph.D. program, my qualifying exam was scheduled for August 14, 2004. The night before, I
dreamed:

Dream 38, Aug. 13, 2004: **Bart and the Snapping Turtle.** I live with Bart. We cannot agree on placement of furniture in our crowded home. The floor is steeply slanted. When I try to approach the head of the dining room table, Bart holds out a snapping turtle, which bites me. I want to move the table to a flat place. A mix of my ex-husband and brother comes to the house but doesn’t want to meet Bart. Later two women live there. One says she likes the way the other just does things and doesn’t worry what Bart thinks or says. I agree.

This dream suggests a strong sense of disequilibrium as I faced my meeting with my five committee members who would decide if I advanced to candidacy in the doctoral program. Jung (1974) writes that “sitting together at one table [in a dream] means relationship, being connected, or ‘put together’” (p. 251). Since in the dream I never joined Bart at the table, the indication is that I did not feel connected with my committee as I approached the meeting though I craved an experience like that of some of my fellow graduate students, whose qualifying exam gave them a sense of momentum and clarity.

Going into the oral exam, psychologically I was partnered with a negative masculine from my shadow, with the critical inner gaze of my father complex. We did not see eye-to-eye as to placement of furniture – symbolizing, to me, functional ideas, plans, projects, just as I had not connected with my committee members on the ideas leading toward the exam. The name Bart might be a play on words, a compound of *bark* and *bite*. His barking is our disagreement – I want to bring ideas of justice to my dissertation project, my committee members want to stay safe in complex yet sterile educational notions such as activity theory, triangles and tools – avoiding the humanity of philosophers who discussed class and human injustice openly. Bart used my own
instinct – a snapping turtle – to further the alienation from the head of my own dining room table – place of nourishment though there is no food on the slanted table. Since, in Jungian dream work, nightmares have a purpose of compensation, compensating for something we are not seeing, the snapping turtle tries to wake my dream ego up to something. And indeed, at the end, my familiar brother and ex-husband refused to even meet this negative masculine; my new female housemates advocated listening less to the negative masculine dictates.

In reality, I barely passed the oral exam the next day. It was very like the dream – alienating and not satisfying. One professor on my committee actually worked on his e-mail during my presentation as well as the discussion after.

But the night after the qualifying exams was a very different matter. I had a big dream, with mythic goddess, animus and animal guide:

Dream 39, August 14, 2004. **Whale Nudge.** I’m at a party, with people of varying ages, not all students. A young Marco and I flirt. We’re younger, perhaps late teens or early 20s. A teacher brings us on a photography excursion. We pass clear-cut areas, trees slashed down to make way for power lines. At the sight of devastation on the land, I call out "Blo-thoo-wee" over and over. At the end we’re crossing an insubstantial bridge made of boards. A huge whale nose presses up. We’re tumbling and scramble for our stuff. Meanwhile the teacher
carefully distributes popcorn and other edibles into our bags. (See Figure 2.)

This dream left me in awe. I had called to a goddess, and stood on boards inches from a massive whale nose. I felt the numen of my unconscious. Numinosity produces inexplicable emotion and awe, giving a sense of grandeur, either frightening or beautiful (Jung, 1960/1991). For the first time, I glimpsed how studying the goddess myths was affecting me on a deep level, giving me new language in imagery for what I was experiencing psychically. In my waking mind, I could not recall the name of the Welsh goddess of spring, Blodeuwedd – I had only a vague memory of her from my readings; my unconscious maintained not only the name but drew on the symbology of the goddess, one who leaves flowers in her wake, to heal and beautify my devastated inner landscape.

The dream begins with Marco, a friend of mine since I was five. I consider him a sensitive, evolved man. He is an architectural photographer but, artistically, loves to photograph landscapes and old buildings in his native Italy. Shalit (2002) depicts a woman’s dream animus as a psychopomp, a guide toward soul. Kalsched (2013) writes that in healing a father complex, a figure from the unconscious comes in a woman’s dreams to help her unite with her sexuality (body) and her spirit (mind) (p. 184). Jung (1953/1990) called the creative animus a soul-figure standing for life itself. My large effort and disappointment in waking life brought forth a guiding animus who accompanied me across the devastated landscape that was my psychic terrain in the wake of the exam. He witnessed with a photographer’s eye, which frames what needs to be seen (Barthes, 1982).

Jung (1989) writes that big or significant dreams, with their striking imagery accompanied by large feeling and numinosity, affect a dreamer’s meaning-making process in lasting ways, that they can break through the veils between the conscious and the unconscious,
even if we do not consciously or accurately interpret them. My calling of the goddess indicated an expanded repertoire of imagery to call upon. Prechtel (2005) points out the need to connect with our original, *indigenous souls*. Every human being, he writes, has a soul that is original, natural. For most, this indigenous soul has been banished to far reaches of the unconscious, under attack by the modern mind, struggling to survive as we subscribe predominantly to the mores of the machine age. We are living battlegrounds, Prechtel writes, between the rationalist mind and the native soul. By getting in touch with both sacred nature and the sense of numen for our ancients in goddess myths, I was tapping the sap of subtlety, the lifeblood of metaphor and myth that Prechtel describes.

In the myth of the fisher king, Parcival, the naïve knight, only had to ask the question in order for a renewed king to emerge and the land to heal (Johnson, 1993). In the same way, I only needed to begin to ask of my unconscious its true nature for healing images to come into my dream-scape.

At the end of the dream, I was crossing a stream, a threshold, a *liminal* space, where what was beyond was not yet defined (Bolen, 1994). The liminal, according to Stein (1983), is a transitional point where one must define one’s soul imperative. The teacher, in the dream, distributed popcorn and small edibles into our bags. My soul was urging that I realize the importance of the small, the mundane, as I find my next soul direction. Jung (2009) writes regarding the importance of small things, the everyday, that only by focusing on the mundane can a person depose the hero ideal of efficiency. This is an immensely important idea for me since I can see now that I held to a concept of greatness required for the Ph.D. endeavor. No great thing is ever achieved by large steps. The abstract idea of needing great thoughts tormented me. I could not breathe life into my work in the abstract.
Regarding the large and the small, Prechtel (2005) writes beautifully that we are brought into the world astride the monstrous horse of human history, and that we must find the courage to get down off the beast to be with the small things we love. My dream teacher crouched to the ground, seeming to ignore the cataclysmic events as I and my companions tottered, pushed off balance by a whale rising up out of the stream bed. The teacher had the right idea, providing small things that would nourish as I traversed the liminal.

Blodeuwedd intones, in myth, “Nine powers in me combined / Nine buds of plant and tree / Long and white are my fingers / As the ninth wave of the sea” (Walker, 1983, p. 111). The goddess in me called to the sea and drew from it a massive feminine instinct that swims the deep unconscious. As Chief Seattle said, “We are part of the earth and it is part of us,” (in Seed, Macy, Fleming, and Naess, 1988, p. 68). The dream left me with a sense of an inner world that could call forth healing.

But the father complex was not nearly resolved. A month after the oral exam, I dreamed of a frightening, bent, half-mechanistic rattler striking me.

_Dream 47, Sept. 26, 2004: Strange Bent Rattler_. I’m locked in a small sterile office with sparse, metal furniture. I notice a rattler in one corner. It is bent at hideous angles, and is partly made of machine parts, not looking at me. My focus draws it, and it strikes me.

I have had fear-producing snake dreams since I was a child. I have made the Ph.D. experience into sterile, metallic place. I believe I was terrified to admit to myself that I might be in the wrong endeavor. Kalsched (2013) writes that the daemonic element often strikes, vampiric, ready to draw blood, when the dreamer gets close to a truth that would be freeing. We would rather repeat a wounding history than face the terror of a great, lonely, unformed freedom (Hollis, 2002). I was still feeling the sting of having been so unimpressive, so inarticulate at my
oral exam.

Stromsted (2007) writes that woman’s voices become “distorted as they seek ways to be acceptable in a largely patriarchal, disembodied and mechanistic culture” (p. 147). I found myself increasingly shy about speaking up. It was almost painful to speak. At workshops in Los Angeles with Circle of Aradia, a Dianic organization based on the Greek goddess Diana, who was sovereign unto herself (Walker, 1983), I particularly threw myself into the parts where we used our voices to call upon guides. I felt intensely vulnerable doing so in front of others. When my turn came, my voice was so shaky the teacher placed herself at my back, stretching her arms along mine and then could I project my voice.

Stromsted (2007) calls for women to reconnect with their instinctual and spiritual intelligence. My instinctual intelligence could not come through as long as I felt alienation from my authentic self-expression. I internalized perceived disapproval, which became a deformed and machine-like snake instinct in my dream. A snake is meant to slide, lithe and sinewy, along the ground. Cornered and wary, my natural instincts attacked, trying to bring awareness.

**Soul Return**

During the months after the qualifying exam, the bent snake dream was more an exception than the rule; I had multiple dreams of loving creatures: a dragon with a golden helm who adored me, a small loving bear, a loving goddess:

*Dream 46, September 14, 2004: Willow Wand. The Lady of the Willow Wand is teaching me the true names in the four directions. She embodies sweetness, strength and grace. I feel powerful love from and for her. As I move from one realm to the next, I try to hear the names and learn them. Diana Oshun creates “laughing chaos,” scattering the messages, kicking them up into dust and “puzzling” them. Lady of the Willow Wand*
continues to intone names, including “Diana Oshun.” I worry that I won’t piece the
names together. By the end I know my willow wand is Whispering One.

Kalsched (2013) writes that a special Otherworldly animal, doll or mythic figure, full of
numinosity, comes in a dream to renew our vital core. This dream seemed to hold the truths of
the universe. The Lady of the Willow Wand gave me the feeling of unconditional love, as I had
experienced with the adoring small dragon and bear. Estes (1992) writes that goddesses such as
Quan Yin in creation myths personify regeneration. Quan Yin, who holds a willow branch, is
associated with mothers, children, and birth. Though ushered in with a trying set of events,
including a difficult and unsatisfying qualifying exam, this was a time of rebirth, renewal toward
soul connection.

Early the next spring, I had more goddess dreams. In one, I sat on a couch in a meadow,
very like the Empress card in the tarot, healing birds. That same night (Dream 52, Feb. 18,
2005), I dreamed of running on a beach, a small, plump seabird lovingly pressed to my cheek. It
remained snuggled softly against my skin, its wing feathers soft, its head turned so it could gaze
affectionately into my eyes. Jung (in Kalsched, 2013) was inspired by alchemists’ descriptions of
experiencing transformation after having been seen by an eye which observed from the depths of
the soul (p. 168).

Bird dreams are an indication of the alchemical sublimatio – the rising of spirit as a result
of heating and distillation (Edinger, 1985). My spirit grew light, as I ascended with new insights
out of the fires and heating of difficulties in the Ph.D. program.

At the start of the summer of 2005, a year after my qualifying exams, I met Charlene. She
was a former teacher working on a Ph.D. in the sociology of education. She read my work and
gave me positive feedback as no one else had. That week, I dreamed:
Dream 55, June 3, 2005: *Gas Station Marketplace with Helping Troupe.* I'm walking along a road in the dark, carrying my car on my shoulder. I make it to a gas station on the outskirts of a city. On the gas station lot is building with an inside marketplace. Colorful gypsy-like people live and work there. In the bathroom, I befriend an eclectic group – a prostitute, a gay man, an older masculine woman. Some are scholars. They offer to help me. I forget what my chapters are, but go through Life Stories and other ideas with them. They show sweet, caring concern. They tell me about their destination, a beach town in Mexico and invite me to come with them. A map on the wall shows the scene, in animation, of crashing waves, and children playing soccer on the sand. I feel a part of the group, included. A beautiful, tall gay man promises to help me financially.

I could lift my car and carry it to fuel, where I found a vibrant marketplace and community. My burden felt lightened by being witnessed and cheered on in waking life. This night place, full of activity, held a sweet sense of belonging – eclectic and supportive. According to Kalsched (2013), an inner experience like that can help the dreamer see through dissociative barriers, releasing her from deforming mirrors (Kalsched, 2013, p. 160). In the dream I experienced myself as worthy of a scholarly community. Shalit (2002) writes that, as the complex is breaking up, instinctual and archetypal raw material are transported “into the city-boundaries of the ego-state” (p. 25). The gas station in the dream sat at the edge of the night city. With the graduate student’s kindness, a load of libidinal material was transported into my conscious realm, allowing a grand *coniunctio* – a connection of the unconscious with the conscious mind, a psychic cohesion (Edinger, 1985).

But the process of psychic healing is never a direct line. A few nights later, I had a nightmare:
Dream 56, June 9, 2005: **Car Speeding Toward Kids On Winding Mountain Road.** My kids are riding, on bellies, on skateboards, down a winding mountain road. My son Soren keeps swerving out into the center of the road. Meanwhile, I see a car is approaching fast around the blind corners. There are four children: my boy and girl, as well as Cheyenne and her baby sister. Sure enough, the car runs over the baby. I run and gather the three kids, bundle them in a blanket. I find the baby and try to re-attach her hand. Then I can’t find the other kids. I’m not really actively looking though I feel distress. I tell the man to get help.

I felt terror and powerlessness as the children rushed pell-mell on their bellies down a steep mountain road. I could see the car careening toward them and felt terrible fear and helplessness. My hopeful connection with a learning community had triggered my self-care system. This system makes an appearance when we have dared to trust, to open to receiving help (Kalsched, 2013). The self-care system, which forms in early life to protect vulnerable bits of the personality during emotional trauma, such as disappointment in attachment (Kalsched), later on becomes daemonic. A promising experience releases the prisoners of the self-care system, i.e. its inner children, and the daemonic force of the self-care system rushes to bring things back as they were. A fresh experience of coniunctio – seemingly just what is needed – can ironically trigger a tyrannical negative force that shows up as a nightmare, to undermine hope of connection; no longer protective, the system is now our inner tormentor.

Edinger (1985) emphasizes the circulatio of alchemical transformation, a constant cycling, ascent followed by descent. The spirit rises with new insights in sublimatio but then must sink back into matter – the process of coagulatio – for the process to complete itself. Alchemically, the sublimatio that had come from being witnessed had to be followed by coagulatio – spirit returning to matter. Going downhill, in dreams, is a symbol of coagulatio.
(Edinger). The wash of human kindness shown by Charlene had caused a sudden, unexpected indwelling of soul – hence the swift riding of my young innocent soul parts careening recklessly downhill. Kalsched (2013) describes *indwelling* as soul returning when our inner worlds come together; my soul could then indwell into its rightful embodied place at the center of my emotional life. Yet the self-care system is only re-configured through relationship, is only repaired by feeling connections.

At the end of the dream, I asked the driver for help in finding the children. Meanwhile, I held the baby’s tiny severed hand. A fragmented ego, Shalit (2002) writes, disconnected from its roots in the Self, may need re-memberment. With the tale of the handless maiden, Johnson (1993) suggests that a woman experiences wounding to her feeling function in an inability to *do*, to act in the world and produce work, represented by the hands. In the dream, I stopped seeking the other children and held only the baby girl’s hand. Kalsched (2013) writes that devotion of time to the inner child results in the regrowth of a woman’s hands – just as in the fairytale. She regains her own ego agency and capacity for creative expression.

**Breaking Through in the Mundane World**

I did generate new hands after that, to some degree. My dissertation writing began in earnest. I set up daily writing practices that same June of 2005, with time log and a writing journal for loosening up with free writing. The journaling became a reflective practice that has carried with me to today. In the unjudged context of my free writes, I found a profound safety and self-befriending, as well as insight and thought synergies.

At the end of the summer, 2005, I received a writing fellowship for the fall that would allow me to solely write without teaching responsibilities. Anticipating that specific time allotted to make significant progress on my dissertation chapters, I felt intense pressure. My son was
entering his senior year of high school, a time of life-changing events—applying to colleges, demands for high academic performance, along with senior sports and social activities. My daughter homeschooled through high school and was having trouble segueing out into the world. I did not want to compromise my devotion either to family or dissertation.

*Dream 67, Sept. 25, 2005: Inflammatory Milk between A Tiger and My Lion.* There’s a tiger lapping lazily from a bowl of milk. Water drops hit the milk and fire bursts. I try to keep my lion safe from the tiger. (See Figure 3, below.)

I felt immediately that the two cats facing off had to do with my struggles and fears around my writing. My adviser had said she did not want to see anything but polished work. I wanted dynamic discussion of the concepts. Her doubts regarding the content and disinterest and lack of confidence in me sank into my psyche, magnifying my own doubts. Just opening the

*Figure 3: Dream collage, “Inflammatory Milk, Lion and Tiger Circling.”*
chapter from the previous day’s work was an inner battleground. Suffuse in me was the need to find and draw from the place that was most fertile and alive, to meet the demands of the university at the level expected. That fertile place I reached for might be depicted, in the dream, as the volatile milk that would erupt in flame if water hit it. The water was my emotions around the process.

A rounded bowl indicates the feminine principal (Signell, 1990). I had not yet associated my creative productivity with my feminine essence or source. In alchemy, the lion represents intellect (Edinger, 1985). The stripes on the tiger might have symbolized lines of written text such as that I feared – my own writing on the page. The emotion of fear, as I, partnering my mind or intellect, circle, trying to get at the prima materia – the fertile undifferentiated first matter of alchemy (Edinger, 1985) produces a volatile mixture, like quicksilver, erupting into flames as emotional frustration.

This dream indicates powerful inner activity and the heating needed to move transformation forward. “Everything be it living, growing or metallic comes into existence by virtue of the interior force of fire or some other accidental active heat” (Trismonis, 1582/1908, p. 18). I pounded out all the main body chapters of my dissertation during the allotted time, the three fellowship months. Each chapter had its own shape and ideas based on the extensive data I had gathered at nine inner city high schools.

**Death of the Father**

Toward the end of that quarter, on December 2, 2005, my father died. Two weeks later, I dreamed:

*Dream 80, Dec. 15, 2005: Giant Burns Dolls at his Cave Mouth. In the black of night, I watch a giant placing stolen dolls in a circle around his fire, intending to burn them. Some*
In collaging this dream, I realized the significance of dolls: their frozen smiles depicted my over-accommodating as a fear of standing up for my work and ideas, of confronting, of displeasing. In childhood, my father forbade me from expressing emotions other than happiness. He told me to raise my eyebrows if I frowned, even if he had just yelled at me. This required that I betray my own emotions and I seethed silently. Kalsched (2013) writes that the child who strives to be loved through compliance turns natural anger in on herself to “subdue ... libidinal need” (p. 84).

My father cast a long giant’s shadow on my life. In the weeks after his death, the giant of my psyche was able to steal the frozen-smiled dolls and burn them. The circle is a feminine
symbol, a symbol of wholeness and of the Self (Hall, 1983). This giant might be seen as the archetypal Great Father, an informing spirit (Jung, 1974, p. 197). Burning the frozen smiles, circling the dolls in a mandala of Self, he ritualized transformation; the smoke could rise to the gods and be transformed with the ashes of the past. Reis (1995) writes that often only with a father’s death is a daughter released from a place of silence and able to reach parts of herself that have been imprisoned (p. 235). At the same time, the Great Mother might be depicted by the cave mouth, as an opening to a birth passage, an initiation passage toward my core center as a woman (Bolen, 1994).

**Home Stretch**

Through 2006, I worked on editing my dissertation. I also saw my son off to Harvard and flew to Switzerland to present a paper at an international conference on science, technologies and society.

After the Europe trip, I had numerous dreams with a numinous feeling of Europe, something indefinably ancient and ancestral. In one, that first November after the Europe trip, an Englishman animus loved me deeply. We dined in renaissance woods – that was my sense of it – and he asked me to please do what he wanted, indicating a table filled with creative writing and art.

In the first six months of 2007, I was sent around in circles by my new male adviser, in whose lab I worked the past two years, teaching practicum courses, setting up research protocols for his afterschool programs, and editing the lab’s international journal.
In that final year, I applied for postdocs and teaching positions, anticipating my defense in May or June of 2007. I had dreams of going north, often on trains. In one, an animus figure promised love:

_Dream 161, February 17, 2007: Red in the North._ A very appealing man brings me and my son to a large communal lodge house, far in the Northwest. When we are first there, I walk alone on the grounds and see rough man in old style country work clothes slicing a living animal on a spit over a fire. Early next morning, Soren and I stand at the north-facing doorway looking out at a shining scene of red dawn light that hits every surface. It’s breathtaking. Red on peaks of the choppy dark sea, on distant, black mountains, on the backs of wild animals that cavort in the snow. To our right, people set up sailboats, three flat rectangles, their triangular sails crossing them, lying flat on the ground under a
canvas awning. I go to hug the leader but discover I have puppy poo smeared on my coat.

I go to the communal house to shower. I pass residents in various activities. A woman has runes tattooed on one cheek. (See Figure 5.)

The dream had a primal essence: the feeling of north, of nature dark and ancient. The lofty, peak-roofed communal house gave me a feel of something I longed for – a sense of belonging in community. We were at the farthest edge of discovered lands. At a liminal doorway – a threshold – I stood alongside a young version of my son. There is a healing sense with the animus figure who invited us there, opened his arms to me, promised love, and a place of belonging.

The red tincture, in alchemy, is a final stage of transformation, the rubedo. Edinger (1985) describes it as the “redness of life” (p. 147). Jung (1952/1987) writes that the red of blood “reanimates consciousness, when shadow has dissolved and rejoined the unity of the psyche” (p. 228f).

Shortly after this dream, I came across the following poem and recorded it in my journal:

**Envoi**
Imprisoned by four walls
(to the North, the crystal of non-knowledge
a landscape to be invented
to the South, the reflective memory
to the East, the mirror
to the West, stone and the song of silence)
I wrote messages, but received no reply


By that point, I had allowed the Ph.D. endeavor to become something oppressive. I had erected four walls of stone, obdurate and immovable. My energy was still aimed toward becoming a professor, but between me and there was hard stone. My soul dreamed of going north, where all possibility existed, a landscape to be invented. Like the many-faceted crystal, in
my dream, red dawn light was cast onto every surface to the north. The south has now become a source of reflective memory, for the notes I produced during the dissertation years have provided me with unparalleled material for self-understanding, of how dreams depict our inner experience, reacting to outer life and the emotions produced by it.

In May of 2007, my adviser told me I would not be able defend until the fall. He forbade me from sharing my chapters with the rest of the committee, as though they were something dirty, contaminating. I dreamed:

May 14, 2007: **Stitching Human Matter.** I sit in a long narrow room, among high ancient stone walls. I stitch dead skin around living human matter. I work swiftly; I am the only one with this skill. The matter arrives, six balls at a time, in a plastic bag that is set on a cheap plastic chair by the door. Water in the bag is toxic. I am required to set the balls, once stitched in my magical way, on metal shelves by the back wall. I despise handing them over to the ones in power. I slip some clandestinely into a corpse on a gurney, feeling I at least save those. Beyond the back wall is an infinite, malevolent blackness. (See Figure 6.)
This dream had a strong numen about it, both frightening and fascinating. The ancient, stone walls gave it an ancestral feel. Something alchemical occurs to change the balls as I stitch them.

I see multiple layers of possible meaning in the dream. I put so much work into my dissertation chapters, which my adviser was trying to distort into a benign, quantitative project, stripping away the work I had produced, bit by bit. For most of the chapters, I never received feedback, as my adviser had me converting the first chapters one way, then another.

On another level, this dream shows how my Ph.D. endeavor demanded an over-emphasis on the light; my soul responded with a demand to look at darkness. Jung (1974) writes of darkness as the mother source. Light may be the foundation of consciousness but it is in darkness that we return to source. We need both. A death - mortificatio (Edinger, 1985) – has to occur, a putrefaction of the old ruling principle, the dying king, making space for new.

At the same time, the dream might be about soul-making. I was ignoring what really mattered at a soul level, not acknowledging my immense inner changes that were coming about by the combination of the difficult writing endeavor, the emotions and frustrations, along with the concomitant inner and spiritual work. In the dream, I stitched the dead skin around the ball of human matter. As alchemy, I performed “moistening of dry bodies so they may be restored to greening and growing… moist and dry are joined together” (Trismosin, 1582/1920, p. 19), the alchemical fusion of coniunctio, in psychology, the connecting of ego with Self.

Beyond the wall is a glimpse of the vast shadow in the unconscious. In the dream, I did not want to put the result of my work on the metal shelf at the back where those in power – I felt in the dream – would take it back. Perhaps I felt it could not finish its transformation there – if it returned to the shadow. This dream might give a glimpse of how my Self sees the shadow – as
undifferentiated and in some sense toxic or evil, in that the self wants to bring unconscious material to consciousness. My work has been in stitching new conscious matter, bringing it from shadow. Edinger (1985) shares an alchemical image: the perfect man is buried in the body of a mummy; he writes, “In a pit in the earth dead bodies are also buried treasure” (p. 162). As new consciousness, it is treasure contained in the bones – the corpse on the gurney, among the walls of the ancestors, like a crypt. I was, in the dream, a female alchemist, a rebel, fomenting against the rigid ego, the dying king who would be resurrected.

**Gifts from an Evolving Animus at the End of the Road**

My dissertation chapters were not kept utterly in the dark with my adviser. Though my committee members never read or discussed most of them with me, I met every week that last year with Olga, a fellow graduate student, from Belarus. We engaged with each other’s work with lively discussions. Those weekly exchanges were my hallmark experience as a scholar in the Ph.D. program. They gave me a taste of what sharing writing and ideas at that level could be. Experiencing myself and my abilities as a scholar in that way allowed further transforming of my masculine principle, so that even my ex-husband, a previous source of many unpleasant dreams, now brought gifts: In the first:

*Dream 180, May 24, 2007: Mel Digs a Square in my Back Yard, Plants Tea. I discover my ex- has dug a square in my back lawn. He has planted tea trees. They are flourishing. At one edge, a tree is blooming swiftly, like time-lapse photography, purple blossoms dashing through their stages. Mel walks up wearing a vintage flight jacket.*

In the second:

*Dream 188, July 19, 2007: Mel gives gifts in a Courtyard. First we are at either end of a hallway, dimly lit, with austere elegance: only a polished wood oval mirror hangs above*
a similar oval table near me. Then we’re on a bed at the center of a courtyard, green-black, with floodlights shining upward on roses around brick walls. We lie apart. He circles the bed, pees toward the wall, near my head. It splatters me. He sets a pile of white-wrapped gifts on the bed. One is a round medallion, crimson, with Harvard written on it.

These two dreams are both set in green growing places, fertile with life both tamed and wild (Ronnberg, 2010). The Self can be seen in dreams as reassuring symbols of order, such as a mandala, a figure with a clear periphery and a center, a quadrated circle or a square within a circle (Hall, 1983). My Self expressed a sense of greening in these dreams. Jung (2009) uses the term *greening* for psychic and spiritual growth and development. Edinger (1985) writes that miraculous growth of flowers is evidence of proximity to *coniunctio* or the making of Self through new ego consciousness. The connection with Olga allowed me to experience myself in new connected ways. I was finding new awareness of my creative self, functioning from a greater wholeness. Jung (1956/1970) describes,

> In communing with himself he finds … an inner partner; more than that, a relationship that seems like the happiness of … a hidden springtime, when the green seed sprouts from the barren earth… a blessed greenness … signifying … the secret immanence of the divine spirit of life in all things. (p. 432)

Urination in dreams is a form of self-expression, a release of pent-up thought (Taylor, 1993). I was getting a chance to communicate and trust that I had valuable ideas to express. My animus exuberantly peed, gave gifts and planted blossoming trees. The gifts indicated, I suspect, the deep satisfaction brought by sharing my dissertation chapters in the way I had imagined connecting over them with faculty. Talking about them with Olga signaled a change in me as I found my authentic voice in a context of scholarly life. Meeting with her each week, I gained a sense of being valued, and valuing myself as a scholar, trusting my ability to express myself
verbally, sensing a strengthened ego-Self axis. Trismonis (1582/1907) writes,

[They] saw the impetuosity of the Sea. […] Streams […] became foul and stinking in the darkness. They further saw the King of the Earth sink […] Night enveloped all things. The day after, they saw, over the King, an apparent Morning Star. [They saw] sunlight pierce through the clouds with manifold coloured rays… and a sweet perfume [rose] from the earth. Herewith was completed the Time when the King of the Earth was released and Renewed, well-appareled and quite handsome. (p. 29)

The King, ruling factor of the father complex that had dominated so much of my life, drowned and rose renewed as a new positive masculine in me, a new relationship with my depths.

Conclusion

Trying to succeed in the Ph.D. program allowed me no way around my father complex. Richo (2008) writes that we set ourselves up with transference opportunities so that we might resolve what remains to be resolved. I transferred my father complex onto the institution of the Ph.D. program and encountered the complex’ debilitating aspects, bit by bit, in dreams. This is why the complex is also the gift; only in a context that stirred dream material thick with the shadow of the complex could it be transported to my consciousness (Shalit, 2002). I had to work through it in order to perform, to grow in strength and capability in order to complete the tasks at hand. Some of the work was done on an unconscious level but the dreams also spurred me to conscious study. I worked to learn to interpret the dreams. The conscious mind needs to then be an active and reflective recipient of the treasures that arise from the unconscious (Shalit, 2002, p. 7), being willing to examine what is difficult to acknowledge. Equally important was adopting the spiritual work toward nature and the sacred feminine. Those readings and practices added rich symbology for use by my indigenous soul, to make fertile and diverse the psychic terrain that had been stripped of some of its numinosity and ancient wisdom.

With the first dreams in this article, from 2002-2004, the negative masculine figures
represented my constellated father complex, attacking of my inner child, dragging my small
instincts – my human potency – scraping, and snapping at me from the head of my steeply tilted
dining room table. During that time, though I had not gained skill in dream interpretation, I felt
compelled to embrace the inner work, and exploration of spirituality around nature and the
sacred feminine, sensing the sterility and the imbalance of masculine and feminine. The next
time events catalyzed the father complex – later in 2004 – my psyche responded with big dreams,
with new mythic imagery, and healing animals. A guiding animus emerged.

Father-imago, Shalit (2002) writes, is an inner idea of father. There is ongoing dialogue,
through life, between the personal and the collective memory’s image of the father; it is the task
of the complex to link them (p. 37). By working with my dreams, I was able to expand beyond
my personal father experiences to a newly defined masculine within. Potential, previously
ensnared by the complex, was released and became available to me. As I developed my sense of
the divine feminine, Eros was strengthening within me, to begin the healing of the feminine that
had been undermined by early conditioning.

I could not know, ahead of time, what experiences would take me to that liminal
threshold, where I, perforce, had to make soul choices. The choice was to begin to listen to soul
and live more by that as my guide. The Self, wanting wholeness, looks for opportunities to move
toward the liminal and beyond. Though I did not defend my dissertation or earn the Ph.D., I
moved toward a more meaningful and fully lived life. I found a new strength for writing fiction.
In my work in education, I am filled with new clarity and capacity for empathy. This is an opus
for me, a valuable chalice from a difficult quest. It will surely not be the last but it may be the
most momentous of my life, bringing a seismic shift in my midlife inner landscape. Big dreams
have their time; they are not commonplace. Attuning to them is a sacred act.
References


https://archive.org/stream/SplendorSolisAlchemicalTreatisesOfSolomonTrismosin