

– Five –

## *The Dreamer as Artist*

Every person is a dreamer and every dreamer is an artist. Too simplistic? *These are facts.* Yet a friend asks, “Well then, how account for one dreamer elaborating on adventures, a second recounting fine details, and a third speaking blandly of plain-old-vanilla dreams?” The differences lie in each person’s attention to dreams in general and responsiveness to their own dreams in particular.

## *The Artistry of Dreams*

The Unconscious is a supreme artist and combines images in ingenious ways, ranging from bizarre clips to soap operas to documentaries, and can dish out comic relief as well. The Unconscious has a wonderful cross-referencing system and can call up images, lived experiences, and vicarious experiences, not only by major categories—subject, place, time, situation, actor, and action—but also by coincidences, flashes of color or sound, and tone of voice.

Above my desk is a statement about artistic passion: It’s HOW YOU CRAFT A FLAWLESS DEFINITION OF YOURSELF FROM EVERYTHING YOU TOUCH. All right, my expression of artistry is making poems from dreams. Very likely your expression of artistry is something quite different. Your vocabulary, motifs, and themes are unique, your experiences having provided abundant materials for dream work and dream play.

Space does not allow me to convey the meanings of the colors in my dream palette, but I will allude to the *textures* of colors. When flowing colors are noticeable, as in garments or fabrics, they are a cue that I am engaged on an emotional level. Highly polished silver and steel are cues that I am engaged on the intellectual level. Whenever I deal directly with light-colored or white—I am aware that this is the spiritual level. For me gold, especially molten gold, relates to

the Divine. Gold is expressive, too, of the Life Force throughout my entire body and aura, as in a dream titled “Experiencing Gold.” In it “gold makes its way into and through grooves, rather like the leading of a stained-glass window, the gold lines outshining the translucent areas. All very slow, graceful, seemingly purposeful, quiet, and lovely” (Jun 4, 1982). Soon after that dream, during magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) with radioactive dyes coursing through my veins and spinal fluid, I was able to re-imagine that experience of gold. And later, during a prolonged period of recovery, I directed healing energy along the same pathways.

### *The Artist’s Milieu*

The artists I have known generally lived in a meager space in order to rent a studio with adequate space and good light. Some of my dreams show concern about the *apartness* of an artist, creating tension with words such as *apartment*, *departing*, and *compartment*. Feelings vary from freedom to lonesomeness, as if there is a place for everything but everything is not in its place.

Dec 12, 1977

#### Displaying Art in a Department Store

In a large department store, crowds are ushered into an upper hall where there are displays and where orders will be taken at long tables. Some displays hold works of art—statues, blown glass, freeform ornaments 18” to 24” across. They have no purpose other than to feature color and shape.

People sit docilely at tables, like kids in a lunchroom when silence has been commanded. The floor walker (or sales manager or whoever), very haughty, talks to women at the first two tables.

After looking at the scandalously high prices, I walk out, hitching up my sagging knee socks as I go.

#### REFLECTION:

If only I were a painter, this dream would be valuable for its brilliant images.

Two years later I found myself in more gracious settings. In a cathedral of my dreams, “my surroundings could be used as a course in art history” (Jun 3, 1979). Also, “in a well-lighted chapel that I didn’t know existed, some statues look like caricatures of old Romans, some very fleshy, and all look as if in conversation with the others . . . maybe about me!” (Jun 6, 1979).

Mar 1, 1980

#### Art and Architecture

An image of apartments in two dreams. I don’t know if this refers to artists apart in solitude or to artists in the schools, but it has something to do with my career. In the first, my Creative Child is given an opportunity to become an architect. In the second, plans are carried through and apartments are built. But the works are threatened by vandals, and a sensationalist newspaper publicizes the damage.

#### REFLECTIONS:

1. I appreciate that my Creative Child takes an opportunity and carries through on her plans.
2. These dreams resonate with statements made at a symposium on art and science that I was reading last night. George Segal, a sculptor, declared, “An artist has to put his whole life into art; the immoral behavior is in being taken away from that discipline.” And Alex Katz, a painter, insisted, “You put all your energy into your art and anything else becomes immoral behavior.”

The title of the next dream showed my devotion to art:

Jan 17, 1983

#### Artistry Above and Beyond Assignments

This concerns a son of mine, maybe Chas, maybe Stephen, who refuses to do assigned homework. He makes glorious paintings on canvas, on cardboard, on toilet paper, and pages of a coloring book. But he will not write his spelling words three times. So I ask him to write the names of objects in his paintings three times. He does—in script, then printing, then calligraphy, all with brush strokes.

Somehow I feel responsible that he complete his assignments [unlike me to prevail on the children this way]. I stand near him, mentally willing him to perform, but finally sit on a bench near him and watch. The conflict seems to be in me. He's not being obstinate, just engrossed and self-directed.

FEELINGS:

Frustrated, concerned, incomplete; admiring, adaptable, conflicted.

REFLECTIONS:

1. I can't force creativity and, no matter how strong my discipline, I can't impose logical thinking on glorious creations.
2. The artist will be an artist, no matter how meager the opportunities or tools available.
3. I am a poet, come what may. I am an artist.

The next year a black-and-white dream placed me in a final exam situation. "The monitor asks, 'What degree did you hope to earn?' as if I'd flunked even before taking the final. Everyone knows the degree I've been pursuing. [In waking life it's jobs I'm pursuing.] Yet I hesitate . . . a long pause before answering, Art . . . Art Education" (Aug 17, 1984).

Six months later, when the bulk of my work was in editing, I had a compensation dream:

Feb 2, 1985

Delight in Artistry

I waken with a start, hearing, "The world will delight in your life and performance." I know this refers to Charlie Chaplin. Yet I think, It applies to all artists—including the choreographer Carol Anderson and myself. It applies to all loving humans, this emphasis on life and performance, not on products and achievements.

FEELINGS:

Startled, thoughtful.

REFLECTIONS:

1. In Chaplin's "Limelight," he tells a ballerina he's saved from suicide, "Life is desire—the desire of a rose to unfold itself as

a rose, the desire of a stone to be utterly stone.” Of course he was lecturing her about the desire of an artist—to fulfill the artist within.

2. I do not abandon that desire when I am editing.

A month later came a dream that I marked at the time in capital letters: VERY IMPORTANT.

Mar 23, 1985

### Laying One Light Strand over Another

I’m matching small segments of written or spoken words, in the method that I’ve used for paste-up of the anthology. These words appear to me as strips or strands of light. I lay one strand of light on top of another strand of light, to get perfect alignment of the first line, and all the following lines fall into place.

There are two dominant colors: light blue that’s almost white and light yellow that’s almost white.

[In this process] My hands are out in front of me—in the air, in the middle of the group, in the middle of the room—and the light strands appear there for everyone to see.

#### FEELINGS:

Illuminated, effortless, magical.

#### REFLECTIONS:

1. These “almost white” colors in dreams, I associate with illumination. In this particular dream, I associate them with manuscripts.
2. The words, via light strands, that are written by my hands, again relate to manuscripts.
3. The underlay and overlay suggest several of my works:
  - poems already written + revisions
  - mss. already in the works + new approaches to them
  - *Opening Night*, + the marketing of it
  - Poets-in-the-Schools experiences + poetry therapy
  - dream notes + poems derived from them.

I conclude these dreams about the artist’s milieu with one that showed practical challenges to the artist in me:

Oct 26, 1996

Working at a Disadvantage

I'm in a swanky hotel, at a banquet. There are many speeches, some awards, lots of politicking. Now most people have left and I clear a place—pull back a tablecloth—and work on a wood surface. I paint about a dozen pictures. When I spread them to dry, I'm pleased even though I see some of the same motifs and similar colors in a few of them.

I want to give them titles and include a hallmark or logo with my signature. But I'm stuck! There are so many distractions now—the power plays about grants and other ways of funding. So like the Ohio Arts Council affairs—some people yakking and maneuvering to great advantage, others self-congratulatory, simply expecting to be winners.

Here I am, blissfully productive—prolific!—yet at a loss for words, even words for the titles of my work.

FEELINGS:

Disadvantaged; distracted, frustrated; integrating, dedicated; prolific, pleased; blissful.

REFLECTIONS:

1. I was thinking about Abiqui, New Mexico where Georgia O'Keeffe lived and worked for so many years. DR [my massage therapist] knows a woman who has property near O'Keeffe's Ghost Ranch, which I will check out on my next trip.
2. Last night I spent almost three hours gluing the final collage of my "Fire And Ice" series. Unhappy with the result, I covered it with kraft paper, telling myself, "Maybe tomorrow . . ." Yet how many poems have I put to bed in the same way and been glad for them the next day.

*Four Motifs Related to Artistry*

Because my focus has been on dream *themes* rather than on *motifs*, I probably threw away many other examples of art in my dreams. Here I include four motifs, each of which led to an understanding of the theme Making Art.

*Art Glass*

The first instance of art glass in a dream was in the 1970s. That image, too, referred to my writing. Here are the final lines of a poem transposed from that dream:

Do you hear my thought-wings beating?  
 Now folding inward like origami birds,  
 now outward like geometric petals  
 –centers and borders greeting–  
 they expand into a great rose window.  
 Does it touch . . . the stained-glass glow?

Another instance of that glow occurred in a dream with three perspectives. An explanation is warranted here: During workshops I often ask writers to *get into* a landscape or a situation in one of the dozens of pictures I have provided and to proceed from there. That is what occurred in the following dream.

Jan 1, 1989

Getting into or through Windows

The first window has dots like the “snow” in crystal balls at Christmas time. There’s not much for me to see in my surroundings, yet a sense of beauty and awe.

The second window has checks of various widths, strands, and weaves. I feel barred or hemmed in (by social customs?) and wish for stripes and plaids.

The third window is stained-glass. This is multi-dimensional, and its blues and greens suggest open vistas. I sense a questing, though at this time no decisions have to be made.

REFLECTIONS:

1. I’d love to have a crystal-ball window that reveals important clues for living!
2. Stained-glass windows offer congregants an invitation to meditate on Scriptural stories, and in my dreams they signal revelations of the Holy Spirit.

3. I'm reminded of Chagall's glorious windows that almost shout *Hosanna!* Through them Divine Light shines.

Aug 21, 1983

### Shimmering Projects

I find in the bottom drawer of my desk some outlines for stained-glass projects, also a few finished pieces made of cellophane papers. Lots of angels—mostly a shimmering blue with silver or gold highlights. Not sparkling, not something in the cellophane, but a quality of shimmering.

#### FEELINGS:

Too many tidbits. Yet there's a new dimension of feeling when light shines through!

#### REFLECTIONS:

1. If angels here = inspirations, the dream hints at the numerous projects in my desk drawers, which just lie there shimmering in the dark.
2. If angels = messengers from the Divine, they needn't be honored solely during the Christmas season.

A special art glass is cranberry glass, rarely made since the early 1900s because gold is required to produce the unique color. In my dreams gold related to the spiritual level, so I was eager to learn what cranberry glass might portend in my waking life. My first written entry on the subject included the question, "What do I hold up in the light and admire?" (Jun 30, 1986). At that time it was artistry generally, though there was a hint about spiritual development: "It also resonates to healing meditations." One year later there was an additional resonance—the ringing tone of the glass—that was related to life changes I was making and the stretching of boundaries:

Jul 13, 1987

### An Extraordinary Piece of Cranberry Glass

There are several pieces of cranberry glass, but none the shape and size I want. Now there's an extraordinary piece that changes shape and, in the stretching, the glass becomes very fine, delicate. There's a new tone each time

this occurs, depending on the thickness of the glass. I'm more interested now in the tone than in the size or shape.

FEELINGS:

I'm not questioning or wondering, as in most dreams of the past several months. Nor am I awestruck, yet pleased, intrigued, drawn.

QUESTIONS:

Where and when will cranberry glass materialize in my waking life? If it is only a metaphor, how will its meaning manifest in my days?

I managed to locate one cranberry glass pitcher at an antique store during a Poets-in-the-Schools residency, and then another pitcher at another site, without knowing its significance. Dreams with that motif continued.

Nov 27, 1988

More Cranberry Glass

I find many small pieces of cranberry glass on top shelves of cabinets in antique shops. There's always a problem, though—wrong size or shape or weight, not tagged for sale, or chipped, or pressed glass, not blown. I fear I might knock over or pull down several pieces while reaching for the one pitcher that I want.

FEELINGS:

Glad for the abundance; hopeful that I'll find what I want; concerned that I might become acquisitive and greedy; pleased seeing the glass with light passing through it.

REFLECTIONS:

1. The cranberry glass may be a self-image in the sense that I don't generate the Light but that Light does emanate, stream, and occasionally sparkle when passing through me.
2. Another idea that's been suggested to me (more than once) is that I don't have to *do*, only *be*. I don't have to learn hands-on techniques for healing, and I don't even have to focus the Light (cranberry glass does not), only *be*. Sparkle when the Light shines and simply *be* when it does not.

There were numerous dream scenarios in which I found cranberry pitchers and a few in which I purchased them. It was the artist Sandra Shuman who revealed, in *Source Imagery*, that pitchers are similar to chalices and signify a tool or an ability to dip into one's Unconscious. If so, I have an abundance of tools and abilities, in a whole spectrum of color vibrations. And I don't need to put them on display, just appreciate that they will be part of my children's inheritance.

Dreams with that motif continued regularly for five years and occasionally after that.

### *Mandalas*

One of the ways that I responded to dreams was by making a mandala when images showed four-foldedness. (By that I mean four persons or elements well-balanced in a dream.) It is possible that the first mandala I recognized in dreams was in 1986. I had prayed for "images that will help me enjoy my birthday and become genuinely optimistic about my future." Forthcoming was "an image of near-wholeness that I see through opened windows, not through glass. It's a mandala, with a circle in the center and four equal 'arms' touching it at right angles, suggesting intersections. There's a singular star, very bright, to the east of it" (Jul 19, 1986).

Another mandala also appeared in the 1980s. That dream began with my taking a ring and a loose diamond to a jeweler to have a four-petaled brooch made, with the diamond in the center and four rubies balanced around it. The four-foldedness became clear as the dream developed, showing me as: (1) a cleaning lady, (2) the wife of an elected official, (3) a teenage girl, and (4) a personal maid. A question remained for all these self-images: "Why is loving so easy in dream situations and so difficult in everyday life?"

A few years later, four-foldedness was illustrated by white flowers appearing at regular intervals. Though I did not know their significance then, I am sure from my present vantage, decades later, that they represented four eras of my life: gardenias, my wedding flowers; daisies, the "loves-me-loves-me-not" feelings in marriage;

crocus, my revival following serious illness; and fragrant mock-orange, my Self as a late bloomer.

The next mandala was geometric. “It’s a diagram and more—a dynamic at work. This is a rose-window that’s continually expanding and contracting, unfolding and infolding, with a quality of intensity in the center and ease on the periphery” (Jan 3, 1992).

I advanced from observing four-foldedness to participating in its design. “I’m supervising the creation of an intricate, formal garden beyond french doors. The garden has hedges in geometric patterns, also herbs in contained areas, and there’s to be a bush with gorgeous white flowers at the center of all this” (Nov 13, 1992).

A more personal mandala, with accompanying sketch, showed me “lying in bed with four emblems surrounding me” (Aug 21, 1995). As in the Native American medicine wheel, my head was oriented North and the sides of the bed honored the four directions. To East was a stuffed polar bear associated with true love; South, a clown associated with Reiki demonstrations; West, a pillow sometimes employed when I do distance healing; North, a doll representing my Child Self. Between the directional images were books, jewelry, and clothing.

### *Wood-Working*

I was pleased to learn, when making a concordance of my dream images, that

wood-working = word-working = writing,

which is how my acknowledged artist expresses herself. Wood, whether rough-hewn or finished, from window frames to parquet floors, from reliefs to retablos to carved statues, is a cue in my dreams to a conscious aspect of writing. A couple of the earliest references to wood-working (*i.e.*, my writing) were “as opposed to abstraction” (March 1975) and “as opposed to concrete” (May 1975). A clue regarding the conflict between the abstract and the concrete was my submitting poems in competition at the university and manuscripts elsewhere, as well as my judging some state contests. Evidence of the conflict between abstract and concrete appeared on my dream

tablet on New Year's morning 1976 in the following lines, to which I added only the final line to round it out:

All evening I have puzzled over  
 500 pieces of a painting by Dali.  
 After the midnight ballyhoo  
 I will burrow under cover  
 until a welcome thawing when  
 correspondence can come through—  
 scribbles, post-its, poetry  
 of eagerly awaited vigor.

A year later, the relation between wood-working and word-working was explicit. "A little girl wants to go to the Wordsmiths who are working on a slanted gray roof of a house. I tell her to go talk with Smith if she wants. She does, and there's a romantic spark in her. But he is sent on an assignment—about matching wood for the gables of another house. The girl is forlorn. She writes him a note and tells me, "He knows words, and he will know what I mean" (May 16, 1977).

In another dream about wood-working, the focus was on the workshop itself and a courtyard surrounding it:

Aug 30, 1980

Restoration Projects

In a mansion I'm visiting, a huge room is a workshop where the owner restores wood carvings, cabinets, and altars.

The mansion is spread out in several low wings, like a motel except the rooms are connected.

Now I'm physically unable to walk forward, yet able to push myself backward around the grounds and to propel myself fairly accurately without seeing behind me.

REFLECTIONS:

1. The restoring of wood carvings, cabinets, and altars resonates with the anthology I've been working on, *I Name Myself Daughter and It Is Good: Poems of the Spirit by Feminists*.

2. It also resonates with my ardent wish to restore a relationship with a loving God.
3. The “spreading out in low wings” resonates with my poem, “You Have Set My Feet in a Spacious Place.”
4. Propelling myself backward to go forward refers to my desire to have the *Take Fire* book published this year. Those poems deal with the past three decades, and now I desire to go forward.

In this new century, a dream relating to wood-working, and thus to my writing, was congratulatory:

Aug 24, 2016

### Three Images of Wood

[First] Brush trimmings shredded for mulch. I commend someone for this recycling.

[Second] A mural in royal blue and white swirls, in a large room. Brush strokes are from right to left, making overlapping waves. Yet there’s a suggestion of a woman, of three women, in a position like the final swoop of a romantic dance.

[Third] A wood sculpture hung vertically, off-center to the right, on a long wall of a “great room.” Heartwarming. The wood has no knots in it but many swirls, likely heart-wood. It has a smooth finish and high gloss, with a glow like honey. I can imagine this as a totem because some of the swirls suggest faces.

### REFLECTIONS:

1. What I’m recycling are dream notes for *Dream Encounters*, and this is commendable. Even if I’m brushing through themes in a backward way, the result is like a flowing dance. This memoir brushes past an infinite number of details to achieve that flow.
2. The descriptors “heart-warming, heart-wood, smooth finish” represent my life’s work from my present perspective.
3. That the final piece (this memoir) has no knots indicates a selective process that does not deny the existence of knots in my life but chooses to highlight other features.
4. That the 3-D sculpture is hung vertically suggests another dimension, one related to Time.

### *Appreciating the Artist Within*

The examples I've given of artistic *motifs* proceed to the *theme* that they engender: Appreciating. I was introduced to making art in a roundabout way. During my internship in Poetry Therapy, one site was a psychiatric wing of a university hospital, where art therapy was a healing modality for adults as well as adolescents. There the art therapist proclaimed, "Whoever comes into my sessions does art." I enjoyed splashing tempera paints on 18" by 24" paper and loved mixing colors on a small metal palette. Because I was given the task of cleaning up after the patients left, I asked if I might play with their unused paint. The therapist said, "Whatever you like," so I often covered five sheets of paper before going to the sink with the remaining drops of paint. Such fun! During that internship, there came the following dream:

circa 1975

#### The Artist in Me

I'm painting—in oil!—a picture of an ocean, the beach, and a man embracing a woman. The figures are dressed in sarongs of red with gold flowers. I think there should be purple in the color scheme.

Now I take a board with pegs or nails and scrape it across the huge palette affair. I'm going to paint waves or else wavy fields in the foreground. I'm torn between doing a Gauguin or a Van Gogh kind of painting.

At that time there was another allusion to painting, of which only one sentence remains, "Time drips from the artist's brush" (1975). A note written the next morning claimed, "That was not a metaphor, but a reference to the multitude of actions in my waking life."

The art therapist's insistence, and my experience in her lab, convinced me that every person has an artist within. Even though I could not draw other than the stick figures of a kindergartner, I appreciated that my inner artist worked actively in dreams.

In a dream a few months later I was "judging the authenticity of paintings hung sideways or upside down" and I chose "Whistler's

Baby” (Feb 2, 1976). Later in that year was a written exclamation, “Aha! Another painter dream!” There was also mention of paintings and other art objects in galleries and on the porches of a circular house, after which I was “subjected to an art quiz on actual objects, including abstract paintings, a carving that highlights the wood itself, and a Madonna” (Oct 29, 1976).

Paintings in my dreams often referred to a particular artist, but sometimes to an era. For example, I had a series of dreams that progressively revealed social and religious customs at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In one of those dreams, “Portraits come to life, though I don’t remember any of them making speeches. I am the one giving a speech to an afternoon group of ladies. It’s about a magnificent reproduction of a flower. The flower is carved wood, possibly oak, and enormous—easily three feet in diameter. Petal by petal is laid one on the other, yet assembled loosely enough that it looks delicate” (Oct 27, 1976).

Nearly all my dreams are in vivid color. The rare black-and-white dream concerns decision-making and prompts me to ask myself, Is this an absolute? Or am I exaggerating differences? Or is this someone else’s Stuff? Even more rare is a dream in sepia; it occurs relative to an etching, a daguerreotype, or other work of art that I’ve seen but can scarcely remember; hence, to an event in my life that is hazy.

The following dream (Oct 5, 1996), to which I added a few rhyming words, dealt with the colors that, in the Oriental Five Elements paradigm, are ascribed to personal energy fields.

## Dreaming Elemental Colors

This time as if light could be thrown  
on a potter's wheel,  
and this time a ritual—  
to each element an invocation.

For Fire/red I intone,  
“Passionate love, friendship, loyalty,”  
almost as edifying as for Metal/silver,  
“Love of the universe, oh great shining one.”

I proceed to Earth/yellow, Water/blue  
but I've missed a cue . . .  
dear goodness, Wood/the greening!  
Wood, the welcome to every beginning.