

Dream Bibliophile: Books

Ryan Hurd



Melinda Powell

The Hidden Lives of Dreams: What They Can Tell Us and How They Can Change Our World

London: Lagom, 2020

Lucid Surrender: The Alchemy of the Soul in Lucid Dreaming

Dorset: Archive Publishing, 2021

Melinda Powell starting writing her book *The Hidden Lives of Dreams* in 2017, and when it was published in 2020, she just kept typing because she had unleashed a torrent. A year later, she published *Lucid Surrender*.

Although there are differences in style and content, these two books together are an embarrassment of riches for dream studies. They can be read as a single, flowing continuum in the same fashion as listening to Radiohead's two genre-redefining post rock albums *Kid A* and *Amnesiac* (2000, 2001). Those albums were offered separated, a year apart, even though they were recorded in the same Peel sessions and only later teased apart by studio executives. In this same way, *Hidden Lives of Dreams* is the opening in the forest that leads to the sacred grove of trees where *Lucid Surrender* resides.

The books belong together in a single review for another reason: they were both published during the acute stage of the COVID-19 pandemic. Even though, no doubt, this has meant less bookstore readings for Melinda Powell, these two books could not come at a more needed time, a time when the appetite for understanding our dreams has not been so pronounced since the 1980s. This is a time of big dreams, and Powell's new twin works rise to the occasion, synthesizing current research trends, first-hand clinical experience, and tender, personal dreams from the author's own sacred grove.

Yet these two works may appeal to different kinds of readers. So let's look at them in turn.

The Hidden Lives of Dreams: What They Can Tell Us and How They Can Change Our World

Powell begins her 2020 work not with a framing of dreaming within psychology, but set against the zoomed-

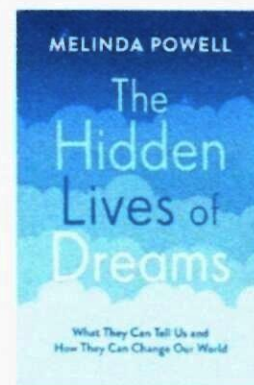
out backdrop of deforestation, pollution, and rising CO₂ levels: the symptoms of climate change. In fact, the book title is an homage to the classic environmental work *The Hidden Life of Trees*. As I write this, the world's human population just hit 8 billion; at the same time, wealth inequality is devastating communities with grinding poverty. Powell notes that the human reflection of this stark reality is insomnia, rampant

substance abuse and a mental health crisis. She sums up the perspective with this chilling statement, "Cultural neglect of the inner world becomes a living nightmare as it finds expression in the decimation of the Earth's natural landscape" (p. 2). At first glance this attitude sounds like dark magical thinking, but for Powell, the state of inner world is not a symptom of the outer world, or vice versa. Rather, throughout this work she finds a third way in between the harsh breakers of materialism and the swamps of idealism. This is the attitude of "As below, so above," a philosophical stance most popular in the 16th century with the medieval alchemists who blended their studies of chemistry and metallurgy with explorations of human consciousness. In this perspective, the two worlds of imagination and exterior reality meet in a third realm, which touches both worlds but belongs to neither. This is the realm of the Imaginal. In Powell's reckoning, the Imaginal offers us a way to heal ourselves at the same time we heal the world. As she returns to this theme in the book's conclusion, she offers a guarded hope, "Only radical change in human attitudes and behaviors can give hope for the future" (p. 200).

How do we get there, to this hope? This is what the book explores in fullness: how dreams provide real insight and opportunities for healing our collective conflicts.

Blending the latest dream research with mysticism and with beautiful, poem-like dreams of her own and of her psychotherapy clients, Powell lays out an argument that dreaming does not just reflect our issues and concerns but throws out "a lifeline."

The Hidden Lives of Dreams has a poetic soul and the reader is rewarded with warmth, insight and imaginal delights that soothe the harried mind. Powell also invites the reader to journey with her on several guided meditations. The effect, for this reader,



is a slowing down, a reconnection to the larger-than-human world, and a temperance for my over-analytical mind. In this spaciousness, a new inner trust finds purchase. For real, this book made me spontaneously make the “mmmm” sound quite a few times.

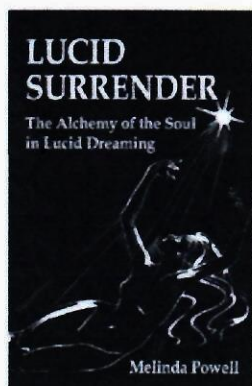
A refreshing aspect of this work is how Powell also moves the reader with confidence into a neglected aspect of Carl Jung’s depth psychology: the anchoring of Jungian thought in medieval alchemical language. For Powell, dream alchemy is no surface metaphor but a studied presentation on the *Magnus Opus*. The Great Work is the storied emotional process in dreams that guides the dreamer as she moves from “breakdown to breakthrough” (p. 72). The book’s chapters serve as alchemical case studies rooted in natural metaphors—trees, polished stones, the play of light on water—that provide the dreamer with “a sedimentary history of our own psyches” (p. 78).

In the last chapter of *The Hidden Lives of Dreams*, Powell introduces how lucid dreaming integrates with this healing alchemical process. She starts with addressing that old marketing pitch: that knowing you are dreaming is equal to controlling the dream. She links this false premise with the Western history of controlling and exploiting nature, an apt ecopsychological critique that reminds me of how Freud used to speak of his Dreamwork as draining the swamps of the unconscious.

Cooperation with the dream is an entirely different approach to lucidity: this is Powell’s lucid surrender. In this way, lucid dreaming is compatible with Jungian dreamwork, and why not? Lucid dreaming is natural, and offers the dreamer a chance to listen. This final chapter I find so exhilarating as the dreamer is reminded, “I belong here too.”

Lucid Surrender: The Alchemy of the Soul in Lucid Dreaming

The opening of the forest reveals a sacred grove that serves as a *temenos*, a term Jung used for dreamwork as a sacred space where the personality is protected from the outside world to do deep work. It is also a meeting grounds to treat with archetypal imagery. That sacred space is Powell’s 2021 book, *Lucid Surrender: The Alchemy of the Soul in Lucid Dreaming*.



At first glance, *Lucid Surrender* is a more personal book than *The Hidden Lives of Dreams*. There are about half as many in-text citations (177 compared to 372; I counted) and the manuscript is bejeweled with rich dreams and personal narrative that weave together significant events throughout Powell’s life as she discovers a new way to be self-aware in her own dreams.

However, *Lucid Surrender* is somehow more collective too. Powell’s concept of Lucid Dream Alchemy is explored, a framework for lucid dreaming that views the embodied practice of lucid surrender through the lens of deep and natural transformational processes. The work takes us through the process of alchemy in all its formal stages: *Nigredo*, *Albedo*, *Citrinitas*, and *Rubedo*. Powell then introduces the fascinating concept of alchemical emblems, which are “templates for understanding and accessing archetypes for transcendence” (p. 48). In my understanding, these emblems can be emotional/visual images in dreams that reveal what stage of the Work we are undergoing, and also provide a cosmic roadmap for the entire process. What’s more, these emblems can also be used consciously in the lucid dream to initiate healing processes. So they are signposts of the dreamer’s psycho-spiritual development, as well as catalysts.

What is lucid surrender? Surrender is not just giving up in a dream, and letting oneself be bowled over by overwhelming titanic forces. Powell evokes Eastern and Western esotericism to describe the practice as a prayerful attitude in which “the dreamer must not only learn to withdraw their projections but also to restrain the ego’s desire for control, for the aim is to accede one’s personal will to the ‘Highest Will,’—to yield to the Greater Wisdom—a yielding known in the Taoist tradition as ‘practicing eternity’” (p. 72).

Personally, the method of lucid surrender provides support for my own phenomenological practice of epoché in the dream, which also demands both a letting go (an active suspension of judgment) and a letting come (integrative insight). Lucid surrender is a paradox, as it is using lucid awareness not to control the dream, but to let go of control. The very act of surrendering therefore is active, not passive. It’s not about going limp in a dream, but a sacred posture of lucidity that requires something Other. Perhaps that word is grace.

Lucid Surrender also shows what a well-tended dream life can bring over a period of decades. Powell explores how images from lucid dreams in her young adulthood return decades later in new combinations and form. These repetitions, Powell suggests, reveal the entirety of the psycho-spiritual process.

For example, in chapter 11, she shares a lifelong series of dreams about mirrors, starting with a fear of mirrors as a child. The mirror eventually reveals itself to be a sacred portal to new realities.

Lucid Surrender travels in deep waters, and Powell is a reliable guide to these forgotten realms of lucid dreaming. Gifted with a new post-Jungian rendering of psychological alchemy, the book seeps into the reader's mind, clarifying what is muddy and providing a path to a more soulful way of life.

Janet Mast



Margaret Honton

Dream Encounters: A Memoir Based on One Woman's Dreams over a Period of 50 Years

Petaluma, CA: Frankalmoigne, 2021

Have you ever looked at a stack of dream journals and thought about how they tell the "other" story of your life—the deeper and broader truth that runs beneath, behind, and beyond the details of ordinary everyday life in waking physical reality? And have you ever wondered, how could I possibly begin to tell this complicated story that reveals itself through my dreams? Now imagine how daunting that challenge would be when the stack holds five decades' worth of dreams!

That is the enormous task Margaret Honton took on and accomplished beautifully with her book *Dream Encounters*, which presents a memoir of her life based on her dreams over 50 years. In Chapter 30, Honton writes, "When I'm working on any project, there's always anxiety about whether I'll live to complete it. Yet this book endeavor, *Dream Encounters*, is both retrospective and prospective; it can continue to the day of my death. Ergo, I need to focus on the affirmation: *I am enough and I have enough time.*" Wise words for any day, any age. The book was completed and published when Honton was 89 years old.

From the first pages, it is clear that Honton is a woman who is deeply in love with dreams and with words. Writing with honesty and bravery, wisdom and clarity, she presents an insightful collection of dreams, arranged by topic, and the evolution of her understanding of how these dreams informed, guided, and transformed her life throughout the years. In the book's prelude, she writes: "I propose that you look at my dreams as if looking within one gallery after

another of an art museum that has arranged a retrospective."

That is exactly what it is like to read her book. It is not like wading through 50 years of someone's dream journals. Rather, each chapter is a thoughtfully-curated grouping of dreams, artfully summarized, with succinct notes on feelings, reflections, and actions. The presentation is never overwhelming, nor

are there too many extraneous details. I sometimes wished to know more about her life and how she navigated certain challenges but, as Honton put it, she "stayed close to the raw material, the dreams themselves."

There certainly were incredible challenges and transitions in Honton's lifetime. From childhood, she endured many physical health challenges. After raising eight children, she resumed collegiate studies 1970–1975 and became a graduate student in English at the Ohio State University. Her master's thesis, *To Make Up a Year and a Sphere*, was the first thesis in original poetry accepted by the university. She was a founding member of the Women's Poetry Workshop at OSU and over ten years had residencies in Ohio's Poets-in-the-Schools Program. In her 50s, she found the courage to leave a 33-year marriage and reinvent her life on her own. At age 58, a near-death experience after a car crash launched her into a new holistic healing path which she used to help others. Along the way, from the early 1970s onward, she paid attention to her dreams.

Honton's dedication to dream studies is impressive. In Chapter 10, *The Give-and-Take of Dream Notes*, she explains that "only after writing five years of dream notes did I begin studying books on the subject..." After that, she accumulated an impressive library of dream books, but her first priority was in trusting and exploring the innate wisdom of her own dreams. Later in this chapter she adds, "My focus has always been on the appreciation of dreams' complexity and power, not on the dissecting or dismantling of them." She goes on to describe an appreciation for Jung's concept of "the meandering pattern" and seeing what becomes visible over a long period of time.

Honton's delightful sense of humor and playful spirit

