

The DREAM HEALER
An Opera based on *PILGRIM* by Timothy Findley

Introduction
by Don Mowatt

The DREAM HEALER is a story about disintegration of the psyche, a subject that preoccupied Dr. Carl Jung, self-professed scientist of the unconscious, as it continues to fascinate the psychiatric community. How medical teams reintegrate the personality is what distinguishes them one from another.

The setting is the prestigious though highly controversial Burghölzli Clinic near Zurich in the early 20th century. The characters, and many events, are drawn from the novel *Pilgrim* by Timothy Findley, which is in turn based on actual incidents related in books by and about Carl Jung.

The DREAM HEALER is different from the novel in many aspects, the main difference being that in the opera version, Jung dreams the character *Pilgrim*, and the weight of the story turns to Jung at the Clinic. Here, dream and reality continually fuse and clash, depending on the circumstances. *Pilgrim's* past lives are referred to only, but not followed as they are in Findley's novel. So the opera story is tighter, more unified and contained.

In the opera, no-one is offstage: the patients, the staff and Carl and Emma Jung are always present, and each carries on his or her regular routines as others move the story ahead in solos or ensemble pieces. Life in the clinic-asylum proceeds, not stopping for a moment.

The theme of disintegration weaves through many layers of the story. Carl Jung dreams of a character, *Pilgrim*, who has lived many lives through the centuries and wants to bring his existence to an end. Jung's preoccupation with this character overrides his relationship to his wife and family, to his patients, and to his colleagues. *Pilgrim* in fact becomes so real, the other characters regard him as one of themselves, as does Jung.

Strange and wonderful characters inhabit the Clinic; a man who thinks he's a dog; a beautiful Russian countess, once a famous ballerina, who believes she comes from the Moon; an inventor-emperor; people with strange visions and phobias; a couple who are gender-confused; and all overseen by a staff of doctors and therapists, some of whom were themselves once patients. The world here is topsy-turvy.

Early in the opera, *Pilgrim's* companion, Lady Sybil Quartermaine, asks Jung about disintegration as a symptom of schizophrenia and whether reintegration of the fragments is possible. Replies Jung, "Sometimes we have to accept that things break into pieces." "And then ... ?" Sybil asks. "And then ... is what I do for a living," Jung answers.

Jung's marital disintegration through the disruption of his dream world and intimate relationships with his patients-turned-colleagues is, in the end, re-collected, re-integrated, so that what were fragments are also reconnected, but in new ways.

"And then ... " becomes a journey to integrate the real with the unreal, the supposed with the unimaginable, so that new understandings of the human condition are possible. It is this inner journey of discovery that the life work of Carl Jung, the novel of Timothy Findley and this opera hold in common.

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Synopsis of Acts I and II
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ACT ONE

Dr. Carl Jung has had a powerful and continuing dream of a patient from England brought to his care. The man, known only as Pilgrim, maintains he has lived many lives, some as a man, some as a woman, for nearly a thousand years. Now he wants to die. The dream is so powerful and insistent in Jung's consciousness that Pilgrim comes alive and interacts with the other patients, attendants and doctors at the clinic. He dominates Jung's personal relationship with his family and especially Jung's faithful wife, Emma.

In Jung's dream, Pilgrim is brought to the Burghölzli Clinic in Zurich by his patroness and friend, Lady Sybil Quartermaine, who pleads with Jung to understand and believe the strange tales Pilgrim will tell him.

The appearance of Pilgrim sets in motion tensions between Jung and his superior, Furtwängler, on the most effective ways to treat mental illness. Their disagreements disrupt the routine lives of the other patients who see Pilgrim as a hope, a way out of the confines of the clinic. And Jung's revolutionary methods unsettle the stability of his family. Their equilibrium is further disturbed by the sudden invasion of a former patient turned therapist, Antonia Wolff, who has become Jung's lover.

Among the patients in the clinic most affected by this dream, is the Russian aristocrat and ballerina Blavinskaya, who believes she comes from the Moon. Her clinical attendant is Dora, a simple Swiss villager, who has developed a very close bond with the ballerina. Dora's counterpart, on staff, is the orderly-nurse Kessler, a very real member of the clinic, who drops in and out of Jung's dream world, like many of the others at Burghölzli. In the dream, he is in charge of Pilgrim's daily routine and has also developed a personal attachment to his charge.

The struggle by Emma to secure the bonds of her marriage intensifies. She learns of the infidelity of Jung with Antonia Wolff while she herself is pregnant with another of Carl's children. The struggle for life is then fought on the domestic front as well as in the clinic.

ACT TWO

Act II opens with a burst of emotion, satire, complaints and frustrations by the patients and staff at Burghölzli....a release from the strictures of their routines and regulations. Furtwängler is enraged that his chief psychiatrist would participate in this anarchy. This is the bi-polar extreme, a manic expression of moon-drawn images and tensions (lunacy) in which Blavinskaya seems very much at home. Jung, the life protagonist, whose physical dynamism matches his intellectual virtuosity, is confronted by the forces of death. And the living stage on which this battle is fought is the clinic, a chaotic personification of the borderlands between reality and fantasy, life and death.

Lady Sybil takes Pilgrim into the clinic garden for a picnic. She recalls her friendship with him, trying to calm him. It is their last time together in Jung's dream. Lady Sybil dies in an avalanche.

Pilgrim becomes increasingly agitated, following Lady Sybil's death in the mountains. He is destructive to himself and the clinic as he battles to escape life and the dream world of his psychiatrist, Jung. Death begins to surround them all now as Blavinskaya, the loveliest of the patients, jumps to her death thinking she's flying home to the Moon. Jung is being drawn into his own dream realm as are his other patients.

Jung and Pilgrim spar for victory, Pilgrim railing against Jung's methods. In the end, Pilgrim makes his escape and dies. Pilgrim, who was born in the unconscious of Jung's mind and on the great scientist's marriage bed, is laid to rest with a great disclaimer by the master dreamer. But Emma is the one who sees the way ahead.

Amidst total disintegration at the clinic, Emma's is the vision that allows Jung to re-enter the real world, free once more to continue listening to the cries of his poor, suffering patients and begin the healing again.

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The TITLE
by Don Mowatt

"The Dream is a little hidden door in the innermost and most secret recesses of the psyche, opening into that cosmic night which was psyche long before there was any ego-consciousness, and which will remain psyche no matter how far our ego-consciousness may extend.... All consciousness separates; but in dreams we put on the likeness of that more universal truth, more eternal man dwelling in the darkness of primordial night. There he is still the whole, and the whole is in him, indistinguishable from nature and bare of all egohood. Out of these all-uniting depths arises the dream, be it never so childish, grotesque and immoral."

Carl Jung, "Memories, Dreams, Reflections" (autobiography)

In the search for a name for this operatic story of a great man and his dream, I was looking for a combination of concepts that might express the range of the central character.

As a pioneering psychiatrist, Carl Jung covered an unprecedented spectrum of disciplines: psychology, medicine, religion, art, literature, science and the humanities. Unlike Freud, his was an inclusive rather than an exclusive vision of the world.

As a doctor foremost, he was dedicated to healing. But healing could only be accomplished by going to sources, and these sources were more profound and far ranging than ever his predecessors had imagined.

Hence the radical concept of the collective unconscious and its feeder streams of myth, archetype and dream.

Jung was a dreamer himself and in the dream was able to make connections between art, the humanities and the sciences. Nothing was excluded in his search for understanding and health. One was dependant on the other.

Dreaming has been a preoccupation of many cultures over the centuries, but analysis of dreams was reawakened from the period of antiquity by Sigmund Freud in the second half of the 19th Century. And he was certainly the first to make a systematic connection between dreams and well-being.

So the title came out of this journey and connects the worlds of myth, archetype, and origins to illness and cures for illness.

Don Mowatt, June 2006

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