

DRAFT ESSAY

Nature as muse: Dream incubation

Marion G. Dumont, PhD

The White Swathe

In 2018-2019 I traveled about the United Kingdom and France for eight months. In early January 2019, after time spent in southern France, Ireland and Scotland, I arrived by train from Paris to the city of St. Etienne. I then traveled by car to the home of a family where I had agreed to work as a Senior Au Pair as caregiver and companion to Belou. She and her husband lived in Les Champs, a tiny village in the commune of Montregard nestled in the foothills of the Mezenc Mountains in the department of Haute Loire. It is a woodland community with a long history of woodcutters and lacemakers, farmers and artisans.

After being here a few weeks I pondered the fact that I didn't feel any real connection with this place; no sense of spiritual belonging or connection. In Dordogne, Ireland, and Scotland my dream life had been revelatory but not here in Montregard, that is not until the end of February. Perhaps it was my visit to Le Puy en Velay that sparked a spiritual connection to this place. Before I describe my dreams and their significance to me, I want to first share a bit about the history and mythology of the commune of Montregard for as I learn more about it I realize that I do indeed share a personal connection with this place.

I was born with my sun and moon in Virgo and for those who know me it is evident that my persona mirrors many Virgoan characteristics. I'm earthbound and practical, detail oriented, critical, and analytical to a fault. We are industrious, methodical and efficient. Generally speaking, we Virgos are known to be dependable, steadfast, loyal, quiet, gentle and discerning. I find this description of Virgo to be true of my own nature,

The Virgo astrology sign is ruled by Mercury, and as portrayed in ancient Roman mythology, Mercury wasn't one to sit still for long. This swift-footed god was a bundle of energy, both physically and mentally, and that pretty much sums up the Virgin's makeup. A Virgo sign's brain is in overdrive most of the time, which is why these folks get so much done.¹

A good deal more could be said about this sun sign but that is not what I want to focus on and I bring it up because in reading about the history of Montregard I learned some interesting facts about this medieval village. According to a Wikipedia article, prior to its settlement the village of Montregard was a Gallo-Roman site and formerly known as Mercurio; an obvious reference to the god, Mercury. Prior to the arrival of the Romans this region was dominated by the Celtic peoples, the Arverni.

On February 23rd I visited the historic city of Le Puy en Velay, a 45-minute drive from Montregard. The greatest attraction for me was the Rocher Saint-Michel d'Aiguilhe where a chapel was built in the 10th century on the summit of a volcanic cone in honor of the Archangel

¹<https://www.astrology.com/astrology-101/zodiac-signs/virgo>

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Michael. Like most sacred sites this summit has a long history of being a sacred site prior to the Christianization of the region.² It is believed that during the Gallo-Roman occupation there was a temple dedicated to the god, Mercury.³ The toponymy of Aiguilhe or Aiguille may be an indication of the original Celtic inhabitants as indigenous peoples who lived in relation to the land often gave place-names that reflected the landscape. Place-names were practical and held meaning for the local people rather than being abstract.

I find that Mercury provides for me a personal connection to the place and the region with its ancient temples to this Roman god. Another, perhaps minor connection with Montregard and the surrounding region has to do with my ancestors, the Hendrens who were Scots-Irish weavers and lace makers. On February 25th I had two dreams that at first seemed completely unrelated. I came to discover a connection here for me is lacemaking.

I work with my dreams using a process that I like to refer to as dream incubation. It is a simple process. The word incubate comes from the Latin verb incubare, in- 'upon' and cubare 'to lie; to lie upon. The first step is meant to guide and nurture one's dream life. Before going to sleep set a dream intention and write it down in your journal. Choose one thing that you would like to know more about or gain insight into. It can be written in the form of a question or a request. For example, "I want to know more about the work I'm to do." Or, "Show me how to heal my relationship with..." Set this same intention 3 nights in a row. Record any dreams or sensations you have in the night. Try not to censure your reflections, e.g. exclude the fearful or the disturbing or those things that within the culture are taboo. (I'll give you as an example my "Spring Fertility Dream: Sex with a Talking Rabbit" in a moment.)

The next step in the process of dream incubation is to work with the content of your dream. This process begins upon awakening. Keep a journal by your bedside to record your dreams making note of any details that you may recall or any sensations that you experience, even if they seem irrelevant. Take a few minutes before rising to 'lie upon' your dream so that you have an idea of how you want to support and develop the importance of it as you move through your day. How you work with your dream can take on many different forms. I like to ask myself if the dream has anything to do with my everyday reality and if so, what might the connection be.

Connections are those liminal spaces inbetween things. Pay attention to any words or phrases that may have been said in the dream and any colors or objects that stand out or grab your attention. I will share the details of the two dreams I had on February 26th and my incubation process. These two dreams were very brief and contain few details. As you work with your dreams you will come to understand that even the briefest of dreams can reveal a wealth of meaning and intrigue.

² <http://marche-passion.over-blog.fr/article-saint-michel-d-aiguilhe-et-le-puy-en-velay-61963904.html>

³ A sacred place from the earliest times, the remains of a dolmen seem to have been used for foundations. Later, the Romans worshiped Mercury . <https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aiguilhe#Toponymie>

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Dream #1 I dreamt of Le Puy en Velay which was not surprising seeing it had been only a few days since I had visited this historical city. “Ply the story with the story.” This is the only detail of the dream that survives and was repeated several times in the dream.

Dream #2 I dreamt I was planning a day-long pilgrimage; there was a large white sheet or layer, a white swathe that was narrower at the top and sweeping downward; there was a circle or a wheel. Immediately upon waking the words, “the white lady” came to mind.

I don’t recall any other details. The most striking details of these dreams were the words, “ply the story with the story” and the white swathe. With regards to the second dream I had a sense that the whiteness was of importance although I had no idea why. One of the most important things I’ve learned in working with my dreams is to listen to your intuition. Don’t overthink things, just follow your leads. Let me share my experience with dream #2 and you will understand what I mean.

During my time in Les Champs I had three hours to myself every Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. During this respite I would walk through the countryside, exploring the fields, woodlands and tiny villages, of which there were many. I counted twelve all within a 2.5 kilometer radius. Generally when I woke up in the morning I had an idea of where I would go exploring but on February 26th 3 o’clock arrived and I still wasn’t sure. I knew I would need to walk down to the goat farm and drop off my milk bottles but that was only a 15 minute distance from the house. Having left my bottles hanging from the barn door I headed back up the hill towards Les Champs. On occasion, if I needed something in town I would walk to Montfaucon, a 45 minute walk. However, if the black lab, Cheyenne were with me, going into town was not an option as I preferred not to have her on a leash so that the both of us could have our freedom. In addition, a neighboring white sheep dog had joined us and was intent on accompanying us for our afternoon ballad.

Generally, if I chose not to walk into town, I would head up the hill and make a right at the tiny village of Robert where a path meandered up through the meadow and into the surrounding woods. Today, however, I chose to bypass Robert and continue on up the narrow road. It’s a fairly steep incline leaving the farm and I walked slowly as I felt into the place and the options that lie before me. Gazing at the hillside the snow-covered fields to my right caught my attention. It had been several weeks since the area had received nearly three feet of snow and there were still large swathes of whiteness, especially in those areas that received less sunlight. The white swathe that covered the field looked very similar to the one in my dream and stirred in me a similar sensation as I’d felt in my dream state. I said to myself why not follow the white swathes of snow? That decision made, I continued up the hillside and noticed another white swathe further in the distance and to my left. I stepped across the narrow ditch and slipped under the

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wire that served as a fence line. In a few minutes I'd traversed the field and arrived at the snow-covered area bordering a group of firs and pines that dominated the crest of the hill. It was a short distance to the other side of the wood that opened up onto another field with a view of the church steeple in Montregard in the distance. I continued onward following the swathes of white as they spread out over the fields until I arrived at the lower fence line and a narrow dirt path. This too was a patchwork of snow, mud and rock with an air of intrigue as it wound up and through tall pines toward the village. Inspired by this new found direction, I quickened my step and followed the pathway and was hopeful when instead of leading directly into the village it veered towards the right and entered what appeared to be a very ancient cluster of dwellings. Although some of the houses were obviously inhabited, others seemed to inhabit another era. I felt like I was crossing not only a space but time, into the heart of a medieval village. There were several buildings and a wide open space surrounded by a rock wall that caught my attention and drew me in. It's difficult to describe in words why exactly I was drawn in. Perhaps it was the how the sunlight highlighted the stone structures and the moss covered stones of the rock wall. I walked around, took several photos and continued down the path.

At the end of this path we came to the main road that led into the village of Montregard. Not wanting to walk a busy road with the dogs I turned around and noticed a large placard with information about the history of this place as well as directions to the statue of St. Jean Francois Régis, (1597-1640) a Jesuit priest and patron saint of this region. (It just so happens that the patron of the home where I was staying is named, Francois Regis.) On that placard was a circular sketch with notations for each of the stone structures that had captured my attention. They were historical landmarks of what is known as "Le Chateau" de Montregard. I was astonished because the sketch on the placard looked very similar to the circle in my dream. On this map were numbers indicating six of the stone structures that stood in this area. I made several rounds of the area in an attempt to locate each of the numbered buildings that I'd first seen when I arrived, discovering that they each had a number posted at inconspicuous places on the outside. I found five of the six and guessed that perhaps the fifth had lost its number. After returning several times to the placard to reread the information I figured out that one of the small signs with a photo of a gross visage and a red arrow pointed in the direction of the statue of St. Jean Francois Régis.

Statues of male Catholic saints don't generally interest me but given the connections with my dream, I felt inspired to find it. More importantly I had learned from the information on the placard that St. Régis was not only the patron saint of Montregard but the patron saint of the lace-makers of this region. Here was another important personal connection for me that linked my Scots-Irish ancestry with this place in France. A tenuous link between my paternal and maternal lineage but, it was a link nonetheless. And for me, if I'd dreamt myself into this place atop this hill then that was enough reason for me to be here.

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I walked in the direction of the arrow and arrived at a cluster of houses at the other end of Le Chateau and was about to give up when I noticed, posted on the side of one of the buildings the same photo with an arrow pointing in a direction that would take me into someone's backyard. Having spent most of my life in the United States and accustomed to the strict lines drawn between private and public I hesitated. Gathering my resolve to locate the statue I walked onto the property, past the main house and along a trail that led up a steep incline and onto a field with several large stone outcroppings. After a few moments I saw at the crest of the hill a tall figure mounted on a square pedestal. The statue of St. Régis was granted a breathtaking, 360 degree-panoramic view of the entire region with the snow-capped Mezenc Mountains to the left and an expanse of farmland and woodland below. Exploring the area I discovered a well-worn path that traversed up the backside, undoubtedly the path of the pilgrims who ascended the hillside every first Sunday in May to celebrate their patron saint.

Later that evening I searched the internet for more information about St. Jean Francois Régis and his relationship to this region. I learned that there is a trail, the GR430 known as le chemin de St. Jean Francois Régis and serves as a pilgrimage trail to Le Puy en Velay. A section of this trail extends from here in Montregard to Tence, and beyond. I am eager to walk this section as there is a druidic rock that is legendary in these parts. To walk this section of trail is my plan for a day long pilgrimage—bringing my dream to fruition.

Le Puy en Velay and the surrounding communes are famous for many things including the “dentellieres,” the lace makers, and the lace that they produced. My host, Regis, informs me that this ancient city is the capital of lacemaking. He was born and has lived all of his life in this region and tells me that his mother was a lace-maker. During my visit to Le Puy I bought an old French spindle for 2 euros at an open air market. I love working with my hands and it served as an inspiration to practice my newly found passion for whittling. This region of the Haute Loire is heavily forested and I am currently living with an elderly patron who has been a woodcutter his whole life. He tells me that this region was once known for its lacemaking but that it exists no more. Walking from Les Champs to the town of Montfaucon I came across a small photograph posted on a roadside marker depicting an elderly “dentelliere” from a bygone era.

Dream #1, the Le Puy dream is related to two other recent dreams that I had in response to dream intentions that I had set. By the way, its good practice to give your dreams titles as part of the incubation process. Each of these three dreams had to do with storytelling and for the sake of time, I will share details of the Le Puy dream only.

“Ply the story with the story.” It's my practice when working with a dream to learn as much as I can about the details presented in the dream or to enact parts of the dream, such as when I followed the white swathes of snow. Look up the meaning and usage of words and phrases, even if they don't make any sense to you in the moment. For example, the word “ply” is used both as

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a verb and a noun. Its use in my dream was in its verb form, to ply or to twist together. When I reflected on my dream I envisioned layers and the weaving of stories together as in the plying of yarn or threads which combines the noun and verb forms. As a noun, ply means one of several layers as in a cloth; one of the strands in yarn; layers of paper or cardboard or one of the veneer sheets in plywood. As a noun, it also means an inclination or bias, a less common usage of the word today.

As an intransitive verb, ‘to ply’ means to apply oneself steadily or to go or travel regularly, such as to ply the waters. In its transitive verb form, ‘to ply’ means to use or to wield diligently; to practice or perform with diligence; to keep furnishing or supplying something, as in “she plied us with fleece”. A small but diverse word that for me, in my dream inspires me to write, but not the dry academic writing I spent many years perfecting. Rather, my dreams encourage me to ply the story with the story, to weave my own stories based with the stories of history, culture and place that I’ve been learning these past 7 months during my travels through France and the UK. I love to explore the connections—those liminal spaces inbetween things. When we give them the space and time, they are revealed to us in a multitude of ways.

(USE PHOTOS HERE OF ROCHER AND THE TOWN OF AIGUILHE, LE ROCHE DRUIDIC, STATUE ST. REGIS, WHITE SWATHE OF SNOW, KNITTING NEEDLES,)

Dream Time Tea

Mugwort

Oat Seed

Elderberry

Nutmeg

Saint John’s Wort

Peppermint

1. **Dreamwork**—below are two ways to work with your dreams

a) *Dream intention:*

At bedtime, choose one thing that you would like to know more about or gain insight into. It can be written in the form of a question or a request. For example, “I want to know more about the work I’m to do.” Or, “Show me how to heal my relationship with...” Set this same intention 3 nights in a row. Record any dreams or sensations you have in the night.

b) *Lightning Dreamwork Game*

(See handout posted under “Session 1” on my website) I really like this practical approach for working with dreams taken from one of Robert Moss’s books.

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October 27, 2016

Last night I inhabited the body of a honey bee

Warm, soft and woolly

I rubbed my legs together

And stared into the dark with my large eyes

Deep down inside the earth

Perfectly fitted inside the chamber

Each side of the hexagon painted with fragrant wax

I rest my head and dream of a better world