

# Dream Bibliophile

## Book Reviews



Kelly Bulkeley



Richard Russo

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***Wake Up! Use Your Nighttime Dreams to Make Your Daytime Dreams Come True***

Justina Lasley

Bloomington, IN: Balboa Press, 2014

Justina Lasley's new book reflects many of the best qualities of dream research and education fostered by the International Association for the Study of Dreams. Her work is always respectful toward the dreamer, open to multiple dimensions of meaning, informed by the latest scientific research, skeptical of simplistic answers, and generous in sharing knowledge and wisdom. Although *Wake Up!* is not intended as a

scientific monograph, Lasley is more familiar with current psychological evidence about the nature and function of dreaming than are most professional investigators. The special contribution of this work is channeling those ideas into practical applications for ordinary people dealing with the various challenges of human life.

Lasley has taught numerous students over the years about basic themes in working with dreams and developing a personal language for communicating those themes to non-specialists. In this book she focuses on dreams as agents of change, growth, and development. Her approach is not directive in terms of telling people what they should and shouldn't do, but more suggestive, encouraging people to consider new possibilities and new ways of looking at their waking life actions, choices, and behaviors. Her case studies focus on people's concerns with relationships, finances, career, and health, because these are the issues of greatest emotional significance in most people's lives. Lasley is also aware that most dreams, especially those with unusually intense images or feelings, have dimensions of meaning beyond the immediate practical concerns of daily life. She is sensitive to aspects of spiritual, religious, and existential meaning

in people's dreams, highlighting their importance to the dreamers but not advocating one particular theological or metaphysical explanation for all of them.

*Wake Up!* is pleasantly arranged, making it easy to read and track the ideas from one section to the next. The book is well designed for people who are brand new to the subject, and it could serve as an excellent introductory text for classes on dreams and dream-sharing in many different settings.

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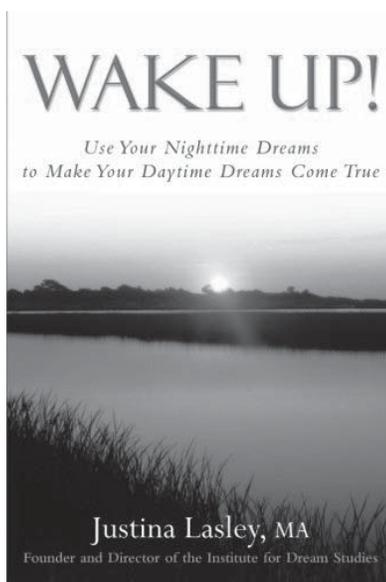
### Richard Russo

***The Dreamworking Manual: A Guide to Using Dreams in Health Care***

Christopher Sowton

Dreamreading Publications, 2013

Christopher Sowton is a naturopath who has incorporated dreamwork into his practice for more than two decades. In recent years he has focused on training other health care professionals to do the same. The fruits of this rich experience are evident in his *Dreamworking Manual*, a guide aimed at a specific audience: health care workers with a serious interest in dreams, but no training and no sense of how to bring dream work into their practices. As such, it is a valuable



contribution to the field. However, there is so much good material here that the book will be of interest to anyone who works with dreams, especially in therapeutic or dream group settings. Despite what the subtitle might seem to imply, this is *not* a book about prodromal dreams or the use of dreamwork to aid in medical diagnosis or treatment (though there are sections on “somatic motifs” and “illness motifs” as they appear in dreams). True to his background in naturopathy and homeopathy, the book is aimed at the broad range of holistic health practitioners for whom the reduction of stress and the emotional and psychic well-being of the client is an important component of their overall physical health. Sowton shows convincingly that dreamwork can be a valuable part of these approaches.

The book is divided into three parts. Parts One (“A Theory of Dreamworking”) and Two (“A Method of Dreamworking”) lay out Sowton’s general approach to understanding and working with dreams. Given the purpose and intended audience of the book, he is very clear that this is a *practical* manual. While he acknowledges the existence of extraordinary dreams, he explains that the majority of dreams the health care practitioner will encounter are closely related to the client’s everyday concerns. The goals of the work are to “facilitate the client’s understanding of how the dream connects to his or her life,” and to “support the client in making a life change that arises from this insight.”

Sowton’s method consists of five stages. The first is Capturing the Dream. Here he provides helpful and detailed advice about improving dream recall and recording dreams.

The dreamwork itself begins with “Amplification”—an unfortunate use of this term, since it has a specific different meaning in Jungian work that is very familiar to dream workers. Sowton uses it to mean *clarification*: filling in the descriptive details and emotional tones of the dream to get as complete a picture as possible. The next stage is “Getting Oriented”: exploring themes, looking for metaphors, trying out different ways of understanding the dream. Working in the context of health care, the final two stages are crucial. When we’ve got a sense of the richness of the dream and its possible themes, we begin “Connecting the Dream to the Dreamer’s Life.” When connections have been made, the final step is “Responding to the Dream.” Based on the insights achieved through working the dream, what can the dreamer do to move toward wholeness and well-being?

While much of the material covered in these first two parts is familiar, there are many things I really liked about how Sowton presents it. First of all, he develops his material in a clear, orderly way, so that a complete beginner can follow what he’s talking about. In discussing each stage, he provides detailed strategies to follow, including lists of words and phrases to use and kinds of questions to ask. He also provides lots of examples. I especially appreciated his including the fifth step, “Responding to the Dream,” which is often omitted in dreamwork—as if insight alone is sufficient to produce change in one’s life. Sowton gives specific suggestions for various ways one might respond to a dream, and his approach is expansive. The dreamer’s response needn’t always be a life-changing decision (though it may be); it could also be performing a ritual, creating something (e.g.

an image, an object, a poem), imagining a different reality, or even just resolving to hold the dream in awareness.

Best of all, in his main text and in an ongoing series of sidebars called “Dreamworking Tips,” Sowton addresses problems that may come up during the work. Most dreamwork books focus on presenting the author’s approach, with one nifty example after another, so that the reader comes away with the mistaken impression that working with dreams is going to be easy—an illusion quickly shattered the first time they sit down with a client or group and are faced with a fresh dream! Sowton’s thoughtful approach, based on years of experience, anticipates many of the difficulties that will be encountered during the work, and offers helpful advice on how to deal with them. Among the many topics addressed are: How do you choose which dream to work on? What if the client inundates you with too many dreams? How do you approach a very long dream with many scenes? A fragment? A poorly remembered dream? What if the client gets locked into one way of looking at the dream, which you feel isn’t fruitful? What do you do if you suddenly feel lost in the middle of the work and don’t know how to proceed? What if you explore the many facets of the dream, but then can’t connect it to the dreamer’s life? Especially relevant to the intended audience of the book are issues such as: What if the client is resistant to the whole idea of dreamwork? What if you only have limited time to discuss a dream, e.g. five or ten minutes during the course of an hour-long session devoted to other work? Is it still possible to do effective dreamwork under these conditions? Sowton’s insights regarding these

and many similar questions will be helpful to even the most experienced dreamworker.

In his glowing introduction, Bob Van de Castle says that if only he'd had this book when he started out, it could have saved him decades of effort in becoming an effective dreamworker. I think he probably had Part Three of the book in mind when he made that enthusiastic remark. In this section, "Recognizing and Working with Common Dream Motifs," Sowton takes an original approach that is a real contribution to the field and will be of great interest to anyone who works with dreams.

Most dream books include a chapter on common types of dreams, which include things like being naked in public, being unprepared for a test, or being chased by a threatening figure. Researchers from Hall and Van de Castle to Patricia Garfield have sought to identify the most common dream themes.

Sowton's approach differs from these, in that he shifts away from the manifest content of the dream (e.g., "being chased") to the meta-level of general patterns in dreams, which he calls *dream motifs*. He identifies twelve common dream motifs (such as "ego check motifs" and "shadow motifs"), which fall into three main categories: dreams that show the dreamer's current situation; dreams that relate to a process trying to happen in the psyche and are asking for a specific task to be done; and dreams that provide a glimpse of what we might become. One upshot is that some familiar "common dream themes" may turn out to be part of the same dream motif; for example, difficulty driving a vehicle and dreaming about a famous person are both "ego check" dream

motifs (which ask the dreamer to become aware of some aspect of how the ego is behaving or viewing the world). More importantly—and this is where Sowton uncovers new ground—different dream motifs may suggest different goals for the dreamwork, in turn requiring different approaches and techniques. He even suggests that a common reason why particular sessions may lose focus or lack a satisfying resolution is the dreamworker's failure to identify the dream motif at work in the dream.

An example may be helpful. Sowton provides an excellent explanation of the concept of "shadow" material, which includes distinguishing shadow dream motifs from "rogue part motifs" and "introject motifs." A rogue part is "a part of the psyche that has broken away from the whole and is capable of acting autonomously," while an introject is a construct forced into the psyche from the outside. A "rogue part dream motif" means the dream is presenting a picture of the rogue part. The key point is that if we're dealing with a shadow figure, the goal of the work might be to communicate with it or even integrate it, whereas an introject, which is foreign, or a rogue part, which is acting autonomously and can be harmful, may need to be held at bay and worked with in a different way.

Another interesting group of dream motifs involves the concept of a "limiting field," which is a particular type of neural network that, when activated, can "limit or distort a person's perceptions, emotional reactions, and freedom of choice." In Sowton's application of the term, it sounds a lot like he's talking about complexes—but by shifting the focus to neural networks in

the brain, he frees the health care practitioner from having to buy into any particular school of psychology. (Though, to be fair, Sowton is influenced by Jungian thought and uses terms like "shadow" and "introjections.") The link to dreams is this: a "limiting field dream motif" characterizes a dream that arises from and depicts a limiting field. Common types include brain field motifs (a brain field is a neural network that has become deeply engrained and self-perpetuating), family field motifs, and relationship field motifs.

For each type of dream motif, Sowton gives examples of common ways it manifests in dreams, discusses what the goal of the dreamwork would be, provides specific techniques for working with dreams of that type, and cross-references all the dream examples in the book that illustrate that motif.

A brief review like this can only begin to suggest the wealth of material contained in the book. I know I haven't digested it all upon one reading, and I'm not sure I agree with everything Sowton says (for example, his treatment of birth symbolism), but I can say with certainty that his book is an important contribution to our field. Anyone who is seeking to better understand his own dreams or does dreamwork with others will find much to ponder and to apply in their work. This is not just one more book rehashing familiar ideas about how to work with dreams; as Van de Castle says in his introduction, it's the "real deal."