



mantodea dreamwork

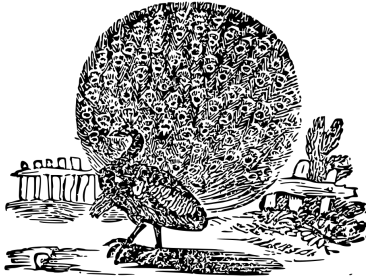
Dream Report for: John Example.

Date of dream: 01/01/2025

Dream Narrative

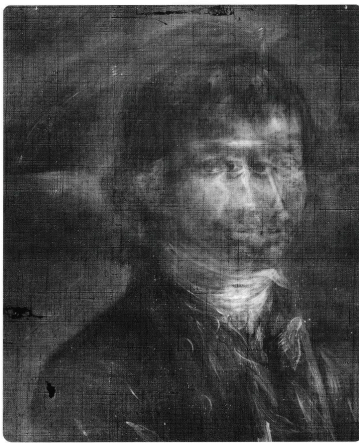
I am in the belly of an old ship, possibly a pirate ship. I can see holes in the planks. It's clear that the ship has not been well-maintained and probably isn't even seaworthy. It's dark, but I can see that water is starting to fill the ship. At the helm is a strange man. All I know about him is that he is from a foreign country. I am trying to tell him that we're in danger, that the ship is clearly taking on water. But he seems completely unphased by this. He barely acknowledges me. He seems to be possessed by some kind of force. He's clearly not thinking about what he's doing. At some point I climb up to the deck of the ship and I see what's motivating him – far away, standing on the top of several treacherous, craggy mountains, are groups of women. They are wearing togas or tunics and waving to him. He is absolutely determined to reach these women. He seems compelled against his will, shouting at me that we're going to the top of the mountains to talk to these women. I'm shouting at him that we are too close to the rocks. I see the rocks tear through the belly of the ship. It starts to sink even further. The man at the helm is still unconcerned. In fact he seems even more driven by this. While the situation on the ship devolves into complete chaos, I look out across the ocean. Suddenly, a gigantic peacock rises out of the waters. It must have been about forty feet tall. It was dazzling, majestic, and seemed to glow with a holy calm. Though it clearly appeared to be a male peacock with its rainbow feathers, my intuition told me that it was actually female. It stared at me gracefully, and its gaze seemed to soothe me immediately. I said out loud: "does nobody else care about this gigantic peacock?" The man at the helm dismissed me, saying something like "yeah, whatever, that happens sometimes". Some of the women said: "well, that's a bad omen". But I felt they were wrong. The peacock continued to glide across the water as the ship smashed itself on the rocks.

Major Symbols



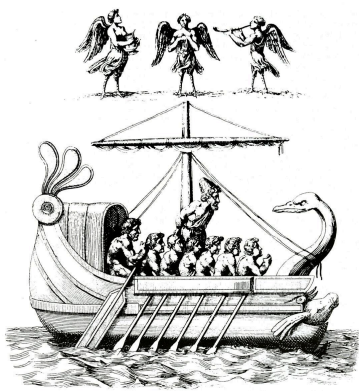
The Peacock

In its calm serenity, it appears to be a wonderful guide. In alchemy, the peacock represented psychological growth that was approaching resolution. Its equal mix of masculine and feminine traits demonstrates an innate wholeness which you may access. This is an extremely positive image.



The Strange Man

The strange man at the helm is clearly not to be trusted. He is driven by egoic desire and ignores his own safety (as well as yours!). He is like a reflex, a compulsion, and he is destructive.



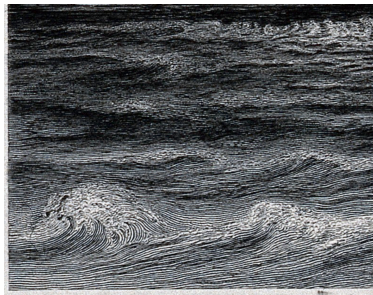
The Sirens

Their togas evoke Greek imagery. In Homer's *Odyssey*, the sirens sang with a beautiful song that attracted men but also drove them to their death. This is the force that compels the strange man, and it is not a force to be taken lightly.



The Ship

Ships are motherly images. They remind us of the womb, of our childhood. The ship in this dream is in disrepair and is taking on water. This likely indicates that an old attitude, one developed in childhood, has been outgrown. It needs to be rebuilt, reborn.



The Waters

Water nearly always represents the vast unconscious mind and the danger of being swallowed up by its contents.

Interpretation

This dream illustrates a highly important moment of psychological growth. Like all growth, it has its attendant anxieties and uncertainties. But these appear to be counterbalanced by strong intimations of a coming wholeness. This challenge, if met with sincerity, will offer clarity and confidence. It may even reveal some spiritual truths. The central thrust of the dream is a conflict between “masculine” drives and notions of the feminine. But let’s start at the beginning.

The dream begins in the belly of an **old wooden ship**. In general, ships are feminine images. This is even revealed to us in common language – we call ships “she”, we refer to them as women. This is an anomaly in the English language, and it points to an ancient tradition. Mariners see the ship as a mother goddess that protects the crew on their long journeys, and our unconscious mind has retained this imprint. For this reason, it’s likely not a coincidence that you find yourself in the **belly** of the ship. It’s clearly a womb-like image, one that should provide safety.

But the ship that provides protection is not being protected. It's old, and there are holes in the planks. It's made of wood, and we can almost smell the rotting boards and mildew. The major takeaway of this, to me, is the notion that you are outgrowing the womb, possibly even the notions of femininity you absorbed in childhood. The ship is not even seaworthy, and water is seeping in.

Water is one of the most common and most important dream symbols we can encounter. In general it represents unconscious contents, and frequently we have dreams in which we are drowning or swept up in floods. This is the psyche's way of telling us that we are in danger of being overtaken by unconscious forces. Heraclitus once said that "it is death for souls to become water". What he meant by this, I feel, is that water dissolves us, causes us to lose our distinct character, to lose our will. When we are swept up by water, we are no longer individuals. We become subject to the awful churn of the collective unconscious, the surrounding culture, images we've inherited, etc. Water is of course not universally negative – but in this dream, it is posing a threat. It is seeping in through the old boards, i.e., it is permeating the womb. Unfortunately, this vessel isn't going to sustain you for much longer. Luckily, the dream provides clues as to a solution here – more on that later.

The greatest threat to the ship is the **Strange Man**. He is "at the helm", i.e., in charge. He seems completely oblivious to the destruction he's causing. You get the sense that he is "from a foreign country". This is important – the "foreign" aspect of this image indicates that *he is not a part of your nature*. He represents points of view that you have likely inherited or absorbed, but that you did not ask for. He doesn't even listen to you. This is a sign that this dynamic is not open to conversation, not something you can reason with. You do something really brave here – you go up to the ship's deck! This willful act indicates a rise in consciousness. You could have just as easily succumbed to the flood, but you don't. You take matters into your own hands. Ascension in dreams can mean many things, but in this case it seems very positive to me. It is a rise in consciousness, a use of the will, a sign that you are curious and investigative. In mythological terms, this is like a small "anabasis", an ascent out of the darkness of the ship's belly. To move "out of the belly" also brings to mind the heroic symbol of the *lysis* – an event in many hero myths in which the hero makes his way out of the belly of a beast. An example of *lysis* can be seen in the story of Jonah. Subtly, but importantly, this is the birth of your determination and heroic consciousness.

Climbing up to the ship's deck, you see the force that is driving the Strange Man – there are women on the craggy rocks. This moment seems to evoke a great deal of Homer's *Odyssey*, book XII. The women in tunics are **the sirens**, figures of irresistible beauty who lure men to their deaths with an enchanting song:

First you will come to the Sirens who enchant all who come near them. If any one unwarily draws in too close and hears the singing of the Sirens, his wife and children will never welcome him home again, for they sit in a green field and warble him to death with the sweetness of their song. There is a great heap of

dead men's bones lying all around, with the flesh still rotting off them. (*Odyssey, Book XII*).

Odysseus, in the myth, is warned by Circe to stop up his ears and bind himself to his ship so that he won't fall under the sirens' spell. Circe is the daughter of Helios, the sun god. The sun is typically a symbol of consciousness, and in this sense she represents feminine wisdom. It is interesting that, following the episode with the sirens in the myth, Odysseus is tasked with navigating around some very treacherous rocks. Rocks are inert, lifeless. They may be signs of stunted growth, arrested development.

If only the Strange Man had guidance from Circe. Where Odysseus was deaf to the sounds of the sirens, *the Strange Man is deaf to your reason*. He likely represents a part of you that feels an impulsive desire, maybe a part of you that chases shallow interactions, empty sexual exploits, material pleasures. But he is not an aspect of your nature. I wonder if you feel pressured to be like the Strange Man, to engage in dangerous "masculine" pursuits. The dream will show that you have nothing to prove, that this sort of peacocking is not necessary...

The **peacock**, ironically, is the symbol that shows the way. It emerges from the waters, i.e., it raises itself out of the unconscious depths, the same depths that threatened to pull you under at the dream's beginning. This is a hint that the peacock is within you, that you have access to its energy. Where the ship founders on the rocks, the peacock glides with ease. It swims across the boundary between water and air, unconsciousness and consciousness – it is perfectly balanced. This is even symbolized in its appearance: it is bright and colorful like a male peacock, but you intuit that it is actually female, a peahen. The old alchemists often illustrated wholeness and balance by drawing beings that were equally male and female, sometimes even with two heads. The peacock represents this. It is brilliant, colorful, confident, but not dangerous, not cocky. It is towering, but gentle. It looks at you as if to say: this Strange Man is not your nature. In fact, the peacock was a favorite symbol of the alchemists. They wrote extensively on an image they called the *cauda pavonis* or "peacock's tail". Jung explains:

In view of the important role which the peacock and the peacock's egg together play in alchemy and also Gnosticism, we may expect the miracle of the *cauda pavonis*, the appearance of "all Colours"... the unfolding and realization of wholeness, once the dark dividing wall has broken down... the peacock is an old emblem of rebirth and resurrection... [it is] a sign that the transformation process is nearing its goal. (*The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, §685–686)

This dream, then, illustrates a powerful transformation that is taking place and possibly nearing completion. The radiant peacock is alluring in a way the sirens cannot understand. This is clearly an *anima* dream. The anima, according to Jung, represents the sort of "hidden" female capacity in the male. This is our ability to connect, to be creative, to glide with ease, to discard earlier false notions of masculinity which are actually simple insecurity. You are clearly working through this, and the peacock is a special

symbol that you may want to orient yourself towards. And it is *your* symbol – notice that the Strange Man dismisses it, the women on the rocks dismiss it. They say it is a bad omen – this is true *for them*. The symbol shows them that their time is limited, that is, you are not entertaining shallow enchantment much longer. You want deeper connections, deeper meaning. Only you understand and see this. Now's the time to meditate on this image and embody it.

Suggested Exercises

These exercises may help clarify your dream symbols and facilitate deep insight. That said, if you experience anxiety, dissociation, or any other highly negative feeling while working with these images, please discontinue the exercise and contact your therapist. If you do not have a therapist, I'll be happy to refer you to one. Negative responses to active imagination are rare, though – relax, ease into it, and enjoy the play of your creative side!

- **Close your eyes and imagine the peacock again.** Allow it to stare at you, as it did in the dream. What feelings does this bring up for you? Allow them to play out without attempting to guide them. If the peacock could say something, what would it say? Ask it without expecting an answer. The peacock seems to be a highly positive image – you may want to call this image to mind when you are feeling stressed, frustrated, or unsure of yourself and your path.
- **Draw, paint, or describe the peacock as vividly as possible.** Take your time, and don't worry about being a "good artist". You don't need to share this image – keep it close, and reflect on it when you feel confused or anxious. Remember its reassuring gaze.
- **Imagine a conversation with the strange man at the helm.** If you were able to talk some sense into him, what would you say? Does he listen? What arguments does he give you in return? Be civil and understanding, but also firm with this man. Take the role of a teacher or parent and explain to him why his actions are dangerous, and also why you need to be in charge.
- **Take control of the dream's ending.** At the end of this dream, the ship is foundering on the rocks. What action should you take? Imagine various scenarios, finding the ones that feel best at the gut level. Really put yourself in the action.

Further Reading

- **C.G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*.** The image of the peacock, referred to in alchemy as the *cauda pavonis*, is referred to many times by Jung throughout this work, as well as *Psychology and Alchemy*. This book also contains extensive explanations on the anima and mother images.

- **Robert Bly, *Iron John: A Book About Men*.** A classic on male psychology, this book is an insightful look at the difficulties of masculine identity. The stranger at the helm could benefit from this book.
- **James Hollis, *Under Saturn's Shadow: The Wounding and Healing of Men*.** This book has many similar themes to *Iron John*. It's an honest look at masculine dynamics – again, a good book for the strange man guiding this ship onto the rocks.



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