

## **Lioness Dreaming: A Somatic Approach to the Animal Ally**

Elizabeth Eowyn Nelson

**Abstract:** The essay uses Jungian and transpersonal psychology to describe an exceptional, numinous encounter with an aging lioness in the South African bush. It explains *somatic dreaming* as a practice of intentionally dwelling with exceptional experience by focusing on the bodily responses of the dreamer and the vivid somatic aspects of the dream images, or figures, as embodied others. The autonomous figures of what transpersonal psychology calls an exceptional human experience (EHE) and Jungians describe as a numinous waking vision (in contradistinction to a night time dream) are both deeply strange and strangely familiar. What are the possibilities and challenges of somatic dreaming while awake? How might such an approach evoke and express soul? The author contends that hosting living images in and with the body can be powerfully transformative, altering the course of one's life.

**Keywords:** dreams, exceptional human experience (EHE), Jung, numinous, peak experience, somatic dreaming, transpersonal psychology, visions, wild animal encounter

Jungian and transpersonal psychologies place importance on non-ordinary or exceptional human experiences, though they use different language to describe them. Transpersonal psychology explores what Maslow (1971) called the farther reaches of human nature by investigating the “extension of consciousness beyond the usual ego boundaries and the limitations of time and space” (Grof, 1973, pp. 48–49). Jung borrowed the term *numinous* from Otto's conceptualization of “the holy” (*das heilige*) to describe something similar. “One has the feeling that ‘one is in contact with something that is wholly other—beyond the sphere of what is usual, intelligible and familiar’” (Corbett, 1996, p. 12). Whether one calls the encounter an exceptional human experience (EHE) or numinous, such an event is rare.

Transpersonal psychology asserts that exceptional experiences can be induced through intentional practices (Maslow, 1969). Numinous experiences, on the other hand, are spontaneous and “meant,” implying the action of a transcendent power (Hillman, 1994, p. 67). Neumann (1955/1983) used the phrase “biopsychical seizure” to describe their overwhelming effect (p. 4). Though seizure implies a momentary response, the impact is durable, often exerting “a decisive influence on the mood, inclinations, and tendencies of the personality, and ultimately on its conceptions, intentions, interests, on consciousness and the specific direction of the mind” (pp. 4–5).

The essay applies somatic-dreaming to an exceptional/numinous human experience that was, and continues to be, spiritual and transformative. It describes a personal encounter

with a solitary, aging lioness in the South African bush as the central case study. Meeting the lioness while in South Africa was in itself extraordinary, but the story did not end there. Upon returning home to Los Angeles, thousands of miles and entire worlds from the lioness, I used somatic dreaming techniques to dwell with the lioness again and again.



Figure 1: The lioness. Photograph by Rupert Harris, used with permission.

Many spiritual people adopt practices to dwell with the sacred. Christians, for instance, describe “walking with God” to express their intimate, daily conversation with Jesus. Dwelling and walking indicate the important role of the body in sacred experience. Likewise, somatic dreaming focuses on the bodily responses of the dreamer and the vivid somatic aspects of the encounter. It produces a vivid and meaningful “felt sense” (Gendlin, 1981) of occupying two distinct worlds at one time. One’s customary orientation to consensual reality, the so-called objectively real, continues and is simultaneously transcended, creating an expansion of consciousness beyond the ego. Somatic dreaming also focuses on the body of the other that one encounters in the dream, which often carries a numinous quality. It is a potent way to evoke and express soul and to discover soul companions.

The lioness has become a soul companion to me, an animal ally or “helping spirit” (Raff, 1997, p. 113). I remember her, call upon her, and feel her presence often—which is what many traditionally religious believers say about their relationship with God.

### **The common ground of transpersonal and depth psychologies**

As I reflect on Jung’s work, one core purpose emerged: to make a sacred place in the lives of well-adapted adults for “the irrational and the incomprehensible” because they are real—no matter how much our rational minds resist. Yet how? Jung’s (1929/1957) answer was to cultivate a “new attitude” that is receptive to the spontaneous images arising from a

transpersonal source (the psyche), to trust the images as purposive and meaningful, and to turn to them for guidance. Such an attitude “is of the greatest value for one who selects, from among the things that happen, only those that are acceptable to his conscious judgment, and is gradually drawn out of the stream of life into a stagnant backwater” (p. 17). A strong ego is critically important in well-adapted adults, but Jung warned against rigidity. If our ego boundaries are not permeable to the irrational and the incomprehensible, we may be destined for a narrow, parochial life of stagnation rather than growth.

Most transpersonal psychologists would agree with Jung. Maslow (1969) explicitly advocated “sacralizing of all of life” (p. 8) instead of confining sacred experience to culturally determined times, places, and forms. What naturally arises from this expansive approach is interest in dreams, waking visions, and numinous/exceptional experiences that dissolve the boundaries of conventional ego psychology. Hartelius, Rothe, and Roy (2013) define transpersonal psychology as “a transformative psychology of the whole person in intimate relationship with an interconnected and evolving world” (p. 14). These words are reminiscent of Jung’s assertion that individuation “must lead to more intense and broader collective relationships and not to isolation” (1921/1971, p. 448).

“Intimate relationship” is usually understood as something arising between human beings. Transpersonal psychology, like depth psychology, expands the idea of intimacy to include a feeling of belonging or communion with something other than human. Both agree that transformative intimacy is possible with a startlingly full spectrum of others—whether that other is encountered in waking, dreaming, or dream-like moments. For me, the other was an aging lioness in a remote wilderness of South Africa. She broke my heart.

### **A dream is anything told as a dream**

Before I introduce the elder lioness—*magogo mafazi ngala* in the Shangaan language of South Africa—it is important to say something about my approach to dream. The dream state is commonly thought of as something that occurs exclusively during sleep. Deslauriers (2013), writing about transpersonal psychology and dreams, stated that, “it is generally admitted that waking, dreaming, and sleep represent discrete states of consciousness. However, the boundary separating the states of dreaming from waking is not fixed” (p. 514). Krippner (1990) has suggested that one not agonize over indeterminacy but instead take as a dream “anything that gets told as a dream” (p. 199).

It has been my experience that working with dream returns me to the quality of time I experience in dream; the quality my colleague Joseph Coppin has named “dreamish.” Dreamish time is similar in some respects to the aboriginal idea of “the dreaming,” which is paradoxically ancient and eternal, then and now and yet to come (Berndt, 1987, pp. 479-480). For aboriginals, the dreaming is a source of the sacred. The view concurs with Krippner’s (1990) observation that “among native people, dreams are often a kind of shorthand for experiences in which contact with spiritual beings is made; thus they are a potentially religious experience” (pp. 199-200). Like other religious experience, “their impact may be felt, and their understanding unfolded, over a number of years” (Deslauriers, 2013, p. 513).

During the original dream experience and in the telling afterward, images pour forth that are sometimes nonsensical, sometimes vivid, sometimes fleeting. Regardless of when or how the images arise, they are mysterious and, above all, autonomous, placing dreamers in a relational world not of our own making. “Self-boundaries are expanded in contact with

others in dreams, including numinous contact with the departed in visitation dreams; with spiritual teachers in guidance or teaching dreams; or in dreams where one is emulating an aspect of a teacher” (Deslauriers, 2013, p. 517). Moreover, “relational connections are not limited to the human world” (p. 518). The images (which one could call figures, beings, or presences) are not controlled by the dreamer yet remain both deeply strange and strangely familiar. I suggest that the richness of some images arises through intentional cultivation of their strange familiarity. We never forget that they belong to themselves, and we always remember that they have claimed us.

Strange familiarity describes how I feel about the lioness. Here is the beginning of our story. The end has not yet been written, and it may never be.

### **Case study: *Magogo mafazi ngala***

I should commence the story by saying that my reason for traveling was an academic conference. I had no personal feelings about going to South Africa in particular, and I have no South African relatives that I know of. It just happened to be the setting that particular year, and both a dear friend and I had papers accepted. *Why not go?* I thought. In fact, we had originally planned the trip to include only the conference in Cape Town and immediate return to Los Angeles until one of his friends wisely suggested going on a safari while there. Through a South African friend who lives in Santa Barbara, we contacted an expert guide who planned our eight days in the bush.

From our first encounter with the animals—a half-dozen elephants at a sanctuary just outside of Kruger National Park—I felt something stirring deep within. I began to weep steady, slow, and quiet tears for no discernable reason. I felt myself sink into the dreamish state, as though I were simultaneously traversing the land and being pulled underneath it. I was disoriented, on occasion physically dizzy, as well as unusually quiet. I welcomed the pace of safari, which is slow and patient. No one can drive in Kruger National Park above 35 miles per hour on any road, but visitors do not want to because they are constantly scanning the landscape for game, some of which is very shy or has camouflage down to an art form. Scouting for animals is exciting and fatiguing, and I descended further into a dream-like state.

Let me pause the narrative for a moment to note that my embodied response to safari already suggests many attributes of numinous or sacred irruptions into ordinary life, which include “tears, goosebumps ... and feeling ‘wonderstruck’” (White, 1998, p. 134). I was in a nearly constant state of wonder and had an uncanny feeling of homecoming. I cried but did not sob. Instead, the tears simply rolled down my cheeks silently and dripped off my chin as though I were inexorably dissolving something; I know not what. Later I discovered that my experience fits nine qualities of transformative weeping reported by Anderson (1996), which include relinquishing superficial concerns; re-integrating lost aspects of self; being in profound relationship with the impulse of life; holding together the bittersweet polarities of existence such as life and death, joy, and despair; acute perception of the tragic dimension of life; changes in visual perception; and, finally, expanded awareness (pp. 168–171). Although I was driving through the South African bush in deep conversation with my companions, in awe at each new sighting of the beautiful animals (even the ugly ones were beautiful), I felt the inner silence and solitude that Krishnamurti (1993) asserted is a prerequisite for knowing love. “Only when your heart is empty of the things of the mind, is there love... love without separation, without distance, without time,

without fear” (p. 37). The tears had indeed begun to empty my mind, and my heart was growing full.

Part of the safari consisted of three-hour game drives at dawn and at dusk in the Timbavati area west of Kruger. Exploring the land at these twilight hours intensified my temporal disorientation. We had not entirely dispensed with chronological time, but safari seemed to unfold to an ancient, primordial beat. As I recall the experience now, it is a mood that envelops me. Already the game drives were extraordinary, and I had not yet met the lioness.

On the morning of the second-to-last day in the bush, we had been driving for about two hours seeing very little game, but I didn’t mind. The skies at sunrise and sunset were magnificent. Then the stillness was interrupted by a burst of radio chatter. In the third hour, the drivers and spotters aboard the game vehicles in the area—who are in constant radio contact to cooperate in game tracking—shared the news. A lioness had been spotted. We drove immediately to the area, then slowed to a stop.

At first the lioness was simply a beautiful animal and a rare sighting, and we were enchanted. We slowly trailed her in the vehicle for about twenty minutes at a respectful distance. She completely ignored us. The lioness walked several paces, gazing straight ahead, paused for a time, and then continued on her way. After a short while I began to notice her gait: how carefully she stepped, how slowly. Then I saw the visible wounds on her back and flanks, dark jagged stripes and knots of scar tissue from long-ago wounds and a brighter red patch of a new wound above her bony hips. She was lean, her face thin, and her coat lacked the glossy texture of youth and health. Her appearance was utterly heartbreaking. The wilds of Africa broke my heart repeatedly, the aged lioness more than any other.



Figure 2. The lioness. Photography by Rupert Harris. Used with permission.

After she moved into the bush where we could not follow, our guide told us about her. She is well known in the area, about 16 years old. A solitary, wounded lioness must

keep moving, with little rest, because her own pride will not accept her and because she cannot remain in another pride's territory. In the sense that she knows only the present moment, not the arc of her life, she cannot be a tragic figure. She lives an animal existence, not a narrative one as we humans do. But she does know that she is in physical pain, limited, and alone. She probably feels sadness, too (Bekoff, 2008)—although it is startling and shameful to think that some people still deny that animals *have* emotional lives. Moreover, since lions are a social species and lionesses in particular live, hunt, play, and raise their young together, *magogo mafazi ngala* may acutely feel the sadness of solitary life.

The lioness has become a beloved companion who continues to be alive for me on a daily basis, though we live more than 10,000 miles apart. She is objectively real, a being of grace and dignity, and, for me, our meeting then and our ongoing relationship now is deeply emotional. She continues to transform my life and work in subtle ways. I feel claimed by her in the way that indigenous peoples of North America, who belong to distinct animal clans, would easily understand. *Magogo mafazi ngala* will live in my heart until I die. This essay is dedicated to her.

### **Psychological transformation in the wild**

There is surprisingly little psychological research on transformational encounters with wild animals, though the general field of ecopsychology is growing rapidly (Buzzell & Chalquist, 2009, Jung, 2002, Plotkin, 2007, Roszack, Gomes, & Kramer, 1995). A 1998 phenomenological study by DeMares and Krycka on wild animal triggered peak experiences was the first project of its kind, the authors claimed. Whereas that study focused on human encounters with dolphins and whales, the participants' experience is similar to my encounter with *magogo mafazi ngala*. Both demonstrate the profound and transformative intimacy offered by the more-than-human world.

Jungian psychology and transpersonal psychology face a common challenge. It is not enough to describe a subject; they "must also convey the shifted vision within which this subject matter is considered" (Hartelius et al., 2013, p. 4). Transpersonal psychologists categorically reject reductionism and embrace a holistic vision of people, "their relationships with values, visions, and experiences that took them beyond the boundaries of their individual sense of self" (p. 7). The shifted vision of Jungian psychology begins with the "fundamental premiss [sic] of depth psychology" that Freud (1960/1989) described more than a century ago, without which our field makes little sense: "the division of the psychical into what is conscious and what is unconscious" (p. 3). Jung used both "psyche" and "soul" in his descriptions of the unconscious but was consistent in his regard for its autonomy. "If the soul is really only an idea," Jung (1954/1969) stated "this idea has an alarming air of unpredictability about it—something with qualities no one would ever have imagined" (1954/1969, p. 168). For example, who would have imagined that I would meet a soul companion on safari and that she would be an elder lioness?

Some psychologists may ignore psyche or soul, but it cannot be eliminated. It is the fact of the psyche, something like the invisible yet tangible fact of gravity, which shapes the perspective of depth psychology. Like the gravitational field, the field of psyche is experienced viscerally, in and through the expressive body. The psyche is not only symptomatic but also somatic—that is, psyche is embodied in much more than our illness or disease. "The embodied psyche is foundational to the self in relation with many kinds of others" (Coppin & Nelson, 2017, p. 152).

For many contemporary Jungians, especially of the archetypal school, our disciplinary vision is most succinctly defined by Hillman. In his 1975 text *Re-visioning Psychology* he said that soul is a perspective that deepens events into experiences through “reflective speculation, dream, image, and fantasy” and confers significance through its “special relation with death” (p. xvi). As a Jungian, I named the encounter with *magogo mafazi ngala* a “waking dream.” However, an interested audience in the 19th century might have understood the terms “supernatural” or “paranormal.” Contemporary terms for such an encounter include peak experiences, transpersonal, transcendental, or praeternatural experiences, extraordinary phenomena, or metanormal functioning (Palmer & Broad 2002, p. 31). “Often—and, we believe, unfortunately, because the term suggests that these are not normal or natural—these are called *anomalous experiences*” (p. 31). Although EHEs are “reported widely in the general population,” they are “often misunderstood, not discussed or shared, and even discouraged and feared” (Palmer & Hastings, 2013, p. 334). Early research on ecstatic experiences by Laski (1961) confirms the finding: they were more common than some believe yet rarely reported because many people feared judgment. Her participants remained silent rather than subject themselves to embarrassment or ridicule (p. 8). Since ecstatic experiences were thought to be abnormal or unnatural, those who had them were as well.

How poignant. The very irrational moments that Jung viewed as essential to a full life are closely guarded secrets, often for good reason. “One must remember that when our patients were children their precious experience of the numinosum was often envied, ridiculed, attacked or stolen, and they are understandably reluctant to re-expose themselves to such wounding” (Corbett, 1996, p. 19). Jung’s own experience of the numinosum was a closely guarded secret until the publication of *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* in 1963 and *The Red Book* in 2009—and he has been attacked and ridiculed for them. Yet, when composing his autobiography around 1960, he admitted that “all my works, all my creative activity, has come from those initial fantasies and dreams which began in 1912, almost fifty years ago. Everything that I accomplished in later life was already contained in them” (1963/1989, p. 192).

Meeting the lioness was unexpected and fleeting. Dwelling with her since then has produced a slow, inexorable transformation of my character. She continues to be alive to me, as though I have just met a long-lost member of my family. I wonder what she is doing right now in the same way my imagination reaches out to the people I love. Mostly, I wonder about the lioness’s suffering and the hour of her death because the bush is not kind to the very young and the very old. Her measured stride, age and experience remind me that I, too, am approaching my senior years and need to move carefully. Her solitude reminds me to be grateful for the dense fabric of loving relationships I still enjoy, and it prompts me to enfold her in that fabric, in my imagination and my stories. The people I love the most know about *magogo mafazi ngala*, and for some marvelous reason, they accept her importance to me. In the bush, lioness and I cannot walk side by side. In the dreaming, we can. We do. And I always weep.

### **Image: The common element of dreams, waking visions, and EHEs**

The core ideas of Jung’s (1963/1989) method for working with dreams have far-reaching implications for this essay. “I took great care to try to understand every single image,” he said, and “to realize them in actual life” through paying attention to the ethical obligation

imposed by the dream image (p. 193). “That is what we usually neglect to do,” Jung says, because we fail to comprehend that “the images of the unconscious place a great responsibility on a man. Failure to understand them, or a shirking of ethical responsibility, deprives him of his wholeness and imposes a painful fragmentariness on his life” (p. 193).

For Jung, the source of images could be night-time dreams or waking visions produced through his method of active imagination. Similarly, one might argue that the residue of an EHE is one or more images that remain in the person’s memory, can easily be recalled, and have a transformative effect. Though exceptional experiences are shared with very few people, as mentioned above, they become an essential part of one’s story.

Regardless of the source of the images, they “compel participation,” asserted Jung (1955/6/1970, p. 496). We must not stand by and watch impartially, adopting the lazy attitude of someone sleepwalking through life. The image is a gift and we must offer something in return. But what? At the very least, we offer our close, careful, respectful attention. Beyond that, we must ask the image what *it* wants, and listen carefully for the answer. Doing so is not as simple as it sounds even when, as in my case, the encounter was a waking dream with a living creature. After all, I spent only twenty minutes in the presence of *magogo mafazi ngala*, and the rest, an empiricist might argue, is pure fantasy. Such objection clarifies the first step in working with dream or visionary material: one suspends the ego that has been disciplined to view objective, material reality as the only reality and to believe that imagination is inimical to intellect. Working with images requires “an alert and lively fantasy, and this is not an attribute of those who are inclined by temperament to purely intellectual concepts” (p. 180). Whereas concepts are tidy, offering us “something finished and complete,” he said that “an archetypal image has nothing but its naked fullness, which seems inapprehensible by the intellect. Concepts are coined and negotiable values; but images are life” (p. 180). Moreover, it is the very life in the images that suggests a method for working with them.

But before discussing method, one must seriously question whether it is even possible to pay close, respectful attention to all the images that pour forth in dream, vision, and exceptional human experience. For those of us with busy lives and voluminous dreams, paying close attention to every image is an impossible obligation. I cannot work with every image, nor do I really want to. But some images stand out. They are archetypal in the sense that Hillman (1997) used that word: the image has value to me, and I am willing to spend my time to explore its value. “Rather than pointing at something, ‘archetypal’ points to something, and this is value. By attaching ‘archetypal’ to an image, we ennoble or empower the image with the widest, richest, and deepest possible significance” (p. 83). Certainly there is some choice involved, yet most dreamers I have worked with possess at least a provisional sense of an archetypal (valuable) image. Archetypal images draw attention; they resonate; they seem to have more emotional intensity than other images often by being baffling, strange, weird, frightening, or surprising. I pay particular attention when a dream image exhibits autonomy, by which I mean that, within the ecology of the dream, it goes about its own business, defeating any attempts to make the dream exclusively about the parochial or narrowly self-interested ego.

Because transpersonal and Jungian psychologists share an interest in an expanded sense of self, they view dreams as both personal and more than personal. Of course, dreams happen to and are recalled by individual persons and they can and do illuminate personal issues. I can even say, from my own experience, that the dreaming psyche seems to have



some personal stake in my well-being. And thank goodness for that. Yet archetypal images, those with value, resonate precisely because they transcend personal concerns. Like primordial images that possess “an archaic character” through their “striking accord with familiar mythological motifs” (Jung, 1921/1971, p. 443), archetypal images suggest the deep rootedness of human beings in the collective unconscious. Moreover, they function to draw (or shove) us out of familiar concerns, beliefs, assumptions, and habits of mind into a wider life. As Jung argued, “the primordial image has one great advantage over the clarity of the idea, and that is its vitality. It is a self-activating organism, endowed with generative power” (p. 447).

### **Somatic dreaming and the archetypal image**

Twice in the last few pages I have mentioned the life, vitality, or generativity of archetypal images. “What makes an image archetypal is that so much wealth can be got from it. An archetypal image is a rich image” (Hillman, 1977, p. 80). Regardless of whether the source of the archetypal image is dream, waking vision, or EHE, how can we discover its wealth? Somatic approaches, which fully engage the body of the dreamer with the body of the image, seem especially fruitful. Because such approaches are peculiar and transgressive, it may be best to begin by explaining what they are not.

Most methods of dream analysis typically begin with a verbal report: we record the dream in the morning, we tell it to someone, or maybe we do both. Immediately, we move away from the original medium—the dream as a dramatic scene—toward recollection in language. In the translation from enactment to report, something is gained, and something is lost. The dreamer gains a dream story. Although it may be nonsensical or awkward as a narrative, the dream might be rich in recollected detail. “The pool was 15 feet deep, and at the bottom was a small square red box, with the lid tilted open 30 degrees.” However, the dreamer loses the multi-sensory lived experience of the image. Was the pool water warm or icy cold? Did it smell of chlorine, or the sea, or a fresh spring? Was the box plastic or metal, and how did it feel to her fingertips? Or did the dreamer even get in the water? If not, might she want to? Yalom (1989) noted that the “march, from image to thought to language is treacherous. Casualties occur: the rich, fleecy texture of image, its extraordinary plasticity and flexibility, its private nostalgic emotional hues—all are lost when image is crammed into language” (p. 180). Once adequate words have been found and some understanding is reached, the thinking mind can be tricked into believing it has gotten to the bottom of the image. But “the depth of the image, like that of psyche, is endless” (Hillman, 1978, p. 158).

A somatic approach, by contrast, begins with the assumption that the dreamer engages the entire bodymind when working with the images, greeting the images as autonomous and embodied, too. Images are not flat, two-dimensional pictures, like a *New Yorker* cartoon. “It is only our bias for the visual that leads us to expect psychological imagery to appear as pictures. A fully experienced image is a synaesthetic impression.... That is to say, an image is a total sensation: seen, heard, felt, smelled, and intuited” (Moore, 1990, p. 81) Working somatically with images *recapitulates the total sensation that is the lived experience of the dream*. In other words, it is something like method acting. The dreamer gets into the scene and the scene gets into the dreamer.

To employ the entire bodymind in image work, dreamers train all of their senses—touch, taste, smell, and hearing in addition to sight—for the purpose of appreciating the

image. One can think of it as dwelling with the image for a time, long before (or even instead of) analyzing the image. As we do so, we gain a nose for the particular and become aware of “an animal discrimination going on below our reflections and guiding them” and we learn “to tune in and get in touch, to sniff out and long savor, to accord with the hidden and the invisible sense in an image that makes it really matter” (Hillman, 1979, pp. 192–193).

Tuning in with the bodymind shows that dreams, like myth, always are. Their aliveness can be quickly recalled and explored in the present moment no matter how many months or years have passed. Aizenstat’s (2009) method of DreamTending, which closely follows Hillman, is one of the better approaches for emphasizing the aliveness of dreams. One of the four tenets of his method is explicit in this regard: the dream is happening now. It is no coincidence that Aizenstat’s method incorporates somatic elements and that he is finely attuned to the intercorporeal field between the dreamer and dream tender.

Since 2009, I have been developing and teaching a somatic method of working with dreams that is grounded in what I call the *somatic imagination*. In introducing the phrase *somatic imagination*, I am honoring a remarkable group of depth psychology pioneers: Whitehouse (1956/1999a, 1963/1999b), Chodorow (1997), Adler (1999), and Woodman and Dickson (1997), as well as Hanna (1970), one of the original thinkers in the field of somatic studies. Their work helped me define four central elements of somatic imagination essential to working with dreams. I will use my exceptional experience with *magogo mafazi ngala* to illustrate them.

The first element in somatic dreaming is keen awareness of the body, or *soma*, the term Hanna borrowed from the Greek. It is the root of the word *somatics*, a discipline in its own right (Levine, 1997, Johnson, 1998, McNaughton, 2004), to describe “me, the bodily being ... pulsing, flowing, squeezing and relaxing—flowing and alternating with fear and anger, hunger and sensuality” (Hanna, 1970, p. 35). Because psychic life is rooted in and expressed through the sensuous, sensitive flesh as it is lived from moment to moment, *soma* cannot be left out of any exploration of dreaming psyche. For example, when we first sighted the lioness, I was acutely aware of the absolute stillness of my body, as though my heart and breath had stopped. Watching her in the bush was mesmerizing. I began to observe the sinuous movement of her shoulders and hips as she walked on her sturdy legs, and I noticed how the large pads of her feet descended to the earth and spread slightly. I felt the soles of my own feet relax. Then, when I realized how slowly and painfully she was moving and learned that she had no territory of her own in which to rest safely, I began to recognize her physical pain without the possibility of relief. For the rest of her days, *magogo mafazi ngala* would grow weaker, and without a pride she would be increasingly vulnerable to predators. Her body and my body were in sympathetic resonance. Sorrow and fatigue overwhelmed me.

Second, working with dreams somatically requires close, respectful attention to the body’s dynamic expressive power, which makes itself known in a variety of ways: subtle or obvious, fleeting or slow. Somatic expression also can manifest in an image, emotion, sensation, thought, or inchoate “felt sense” (Gendlin, 1981, p. 10) of dream images. As the encounter with *magogo mafazi ngala* unfolded, I was completely absorbed in all of the ways she moved, paused, and gazed at the terrain. Although her focus was steady, there was a barely perceptible side-to-side rhythmic swaying of her head. When I mimicked her movement with my own head, the words “no, no, no” came to mind and tears welled in my

eyes. *No, this is too much. No, I can go on no longer.* It could be either, or both, or something I have not yet understood. The practice of somatic dreaming fosters the emergence of a living symbol to produce greater understanding without the conceit of final understanding. Enacting the subtle movement of *magogo mafazi ngala's* expressive body with my own gave rise to new thoughts and deeper emotions about my own aging, the ways in which things that used to be easy are now difficult, overwhelming, and painful. The enactment also brought to mind my frail mother who, in the last year of her life, daily faced new physical pain and the relentless deterioration of extreme old age. I was anguished by the obvious physical weakness of *magogo mafazi ngala*—what felt to me like a longing for rest—matched by the unremitting need to keep going to survive. The timing of the wild-animal encounter as I, my mother, and the lioness all face our mortality was not lost on me.

Third, working somatically with dream material can also profit from a dexterous use of body-oriented language. Sensate vocabulary expressing the felt experience of somatic moments such as tightening, loosening, gurgling, buzzing, fluttering, sharp, warm, cool, and so on is helpful. I noted my own somatic response to the lioness: shallow breath, hot pain around my heart that welled up as hot tears, and a sympathetic ache in my knees and pelvis when she slowly lowered herself to the ground for a brief rest. With her belly to the earth and her head on her paws, I wondered if the dry brush was painful on thin, old skin. I wondered if she could truly exhale or if she must remain vigilant.

A fourth element that provides the foundation for somatic dreaming is the willingness to honor embodied emotional life as a necessary and valued expression of the soul. As early as 1956, Whitehouse (1999a) conjectured that the body *is* the unconscious. By disregarding the body, we risk “enthroning the rational, the orderly, the manageable” (p. 45). Reason has its place, but if we resort to it as the only or dominant way of being, we cannot skillfully approach dream images as autonomous entities that are beyond ego control and threaten to decenter an orderly life. For instance, everything I have described so far about my encounter with *magogo mafazi ngala* can, from one perspective, be described as irrational. Yet my own subjective feeling of awe and then grief then were quite real and I can recall them now vividly, as though I never departed from South Africa. Moreover, the lioness’s own pain was quite evident with every step she took, and she was clearly a solitary wanderer without a pride of her own. Is it not far more irrational to imagine that our animal cousins feel nothing of what we do?

To summarize, in a somatic approach to archetypal images, dreamers carefully witness what occurs for them physically and emotionally, and they discover the startling amount of visceral information the images open up. In addition to focusing attention on one’s own body, dreamers are also asked to observe the body of the image: its aliveness, its expressive power, following “the precise movements of its spontaneity” (Hillman, 1979, p. 148). Is it a leap to assume that images are autonomous beings with their own subjectivity? Yes, of course. Furthermore, it is not a leap many people are able or are willing to make. It is difficult to relinquish the comfort of the known. Body, dream, unconscious, and archetypal image—all are *terra incognita* for a surprising number of perceptive and thoughtful people. Yet my own experience as a teacher and a dreamer has convinced me that such a radical leap is necessary to reveal the generativity, purpose, and transformative potential of dreams, visions, and extraordinary/numinous human experiences. Nothing else helps us greet the images as souls on a soul level (Hillman, 1977, p. 80). When we do, the dream becomes far more than an interesting or entertaining story

that we ultimately archive. Instead, it “is a timeless moment, when the mundane meets the divine” (Woodman & Dickson, 1997, p. 165).

### **Transformation and biophilia**

Jungian and transpersonal psychologies possess an ecological sensibility. They are aligned with a growing movement across many disciplines that embrace the concept of *biophilia*, “the innate [human] tendency to focus on life and lifelike processes” (Wilson, 1983, p. 1). Wilson also called it “the innately emotional affiliation of human beings to other living organisms” and urged us to “understand why, in what circumstances and on which occasions, we cherish and protect life” (p. 129). Like Carson before him, Wilson feared that humanity would one day awaken to a silent spring, the title of Carson’s haunting 1962 book that launched the ecology movement. Wilson (1993) spoke unapologetically, if carefully, about the spiritual value of nature (p. 29). “Given that humanity’s relation to the natural environment is as much a part of deep history as social behavior itself, cognitive psychologists have been strangely slow to address its mental consequences” (p. 34). He urged all of us to ask “what will happen to the human psyche when such a defining part of the human evolutionary experience is diminished or erased?” (p. 35).

Wilson’s question is indeed central for people but not for nature. Many cognitive psychologists might scoff at the idea that something beyond a personal *human* encounter has value—if they even possessed the capacity to imagine it. That such an encounter with a wild animal could offer profound intimacy is even further beyond consideration. Yet there is no better word than intimacy. In DeMares and Krycka’s 1998 study, participants universally described feelings of “awe, elation, deep joy, and unconditional love” in the interaction with dolphins and whales and, “as the years pass, they continue to have vivid recall of the event, and equate it with their most satisfying moments,” fashioning it into “a story they will be sharing with others for the rest of their lives” (pp. 174, 167). I already think of my encounter with *magogo mafazi ngala* as an exceptional experience and a cherished memory. It is a story I keep and a story I tell, as I have done in these pages. However, because I approach it from a somatic dreaming perspective, the story is more than a memory. It is alive. She is alive.

Of course, contemporary psychologists, biologists, and ecologists did not discover humanity’s affinity with nature and the deeply spiritual relationships with other creatures that some people experience. Biophilia is akin to the way indigenous peoples have understood their relationship to all forms of life for millennia. Rolling Thunder, a Cherokee-Shoshone medicine man, said that we must respect the fact that “all things—and I mean *all* things—have their own will and their own purpose”; furthermore, respect is “a way of life,” which means that “we never stop realizing and never neglect to carry out our obligation to ourselves and our environment” (quoted in Boyd, 1974, p. 71). When we pay attention to humanity’s place in the interconnected and evolving world, our obligation becomes clear. Or it should.

The kind of animal encounter I had in South Africa is life changing in part because it calls attention to our obligation to the planet. “A consistent pattern in the lives of many committed environmentalists,” Swan (2010) observed, “is having had one or more extraordinary life experiences in nature that seem to ignite a spark in the soul” (p. 9). Out of the eight kinds of experience he describes, one is “interspecies communication and cooperation,” which he illustrates through stories of human encounters with a whale, a blue

jay, and a stag (p. 15). Swan's metaphor—igniting a spark in the soul—is sweetly reminiscent of a lyrical passage in Hillman's powerful 1982 essay urging us to “imagine the *anima mundi* as that particular soul-spark, that seminal image, which offers itself through each thing in its visible form” (p. 77). Perhaps those who have had profound encounters in the natural world have seen and felt that soul spark in the other, regardless of whether that other is whale, dolphin, lion, tree, sky, or any of the innumerable forms of life. Perhaps they have recognized the deep intimacy possible with the natural world and felt the kinship that can transform one's vision.

### **Living with *magogo mafazi ngala*: My ethical obligation**

The story of *magogo mafazi ngala* is, on the face of it, the kind of tale many visitors to Africa return to tell. I saw thousands of animals on safari, about a dozen moved me deeply, and two I will remember forever (both hyenas, but that is another story). *Magogo mafazi ngala* inscribed herself in my soul. I learned and repeated her sonorous name like a mantra for days after the encounter. I say it with great respect and love now, and I hope that my words honor her. She has been my archetypal companion throughout the writing, the kind of relationship I cherish and have explained elsewhere (Nelson, 2013, Coppin & Nelson, 2017). My experience on safari also fits the formal definition of encounters with the numinous as well as EHEs. Meeting *magogo mafazi ngala* was a spontaneous event, far beyond my ability to plan or arrange, on at least two levels: I could not command the lioness to appear and I had no command over my emotional response. Neither the encounter nor my weeping was an ego project; they decisively transcended the ego. I felt awe, durable unconditional love, and joy at the presence of the lioness, blended with terrible compassion for her painful wounds and old bones.

Compassion but not pity: *magogo mafazi ngala* was too dignified for that. At 16 years of age, she is a survivor, which says a great deal about her skill and capacity as a predator. She was, in her youth, a pristine example of what Grace (2001) described so eloquently.

Everything about the lion's body says “hunter.” The supple spine enables the lion to press its belly close to the ground when it is stalking and then to arch into a bow to catapult itself toward its prey. Powerful leg muscles launch the hunter's leap: from a standing position, a lion can jump over a fence the height of two men or spring forward a distance of 12 meters (40 feet). A running lion can reach bursts of 64 kilometers per hour (40 miles per hour), so if one is charging toward you from a distance of 100 meters (300 feet), you have less than six seconds to escape. (p. 9)

The words portray *magogo mafazi ngala* once upon a time but no more.

If soul has a special relationship with death, then the bush is a particularly soulful environment. Safari in the South African bush—and in other wilderness—confronts visitors with the daily reality of predation. When *magogo mafazi ngala* was young and healthy, she aimed her aggression at the weak and the vulnerable, creatures not unlike herself now. The landscape enacts death every moment. It is also vitally alive. Predators and prey define one another through the act of killing and being killed. They shape one another literally, too: “The beauty of the antelope, their fleetness and grace, their vital tension, are evolutionary products of a constant predator pressure that has eliminated the

stolid and slow” (Schaller, 1972, p. 407). Because the predator-prey relationship has remained largely unchanged over the eons, visitors enter primordial time. If fortunate, they readily find every stage of life displayed in one landscape, from the wide-eyed cubs, pups, and calves who draw us close, to the scattered bones that make us recoil in uneasy silence. Rarely in ordinary life are humans confronted with the archaic layers that undergird waking reality and so much evidence of decay and death. An animal’s familiarity with death may suggest why we view them as “carriers of soul, perhaps totem carriers of our own free-soul or death-soul” (Hillman, 1979, p. 148). I learned that they are there for themselves, first and foremost. With a predator’s easy capacity for nocturnal life, they may also be there “to help us see in the dark” (p. 148), where darkness symbolizes an underworld perspective, a death perspective, wholly different from the light of conscious reality.

Although safari was not the weird concatenation of objects, people, and events produced by night time dreams, it was a dream-like encounter with things I had never seen before. Particularly on the game drives, I had no control over what creatures would show up, how, and for how long. Like *magogo mafazi ngala*, dream images are autonomous, walking through the landscape of our imagination. We do not control them. They are not even ours. In fact, safari is reminiscent of Hillman’s (1979) statement about archetypal images, which uses especially apt language. “To our animal faith,” he begins, “the image is simply there, living, moving like the airs we breathe, whether we believe in it or not, whether it numinously nods or not, whether we understand it or not” (p. 143). The lioness was simply there, moving according to her own needs. She never once nodded at me or any of us. And though I can conjecture about her experience, it would be the worst sort of arrogance to say that I understand her.

But I want to understand. One could say that the effort to recall a dream or work with images bespeaks the desire to understand. Thus, if I were to use the traditional moves of depth psychology, I would begin with association: what occurs to me in relationship to lioness? The move keeps lioness in the personal sphere, as though she were here for me. Next, I would amplify the image, drawing on cultural, mythical, religious, and historical associations to lioness. Amplification keeps lioness in the human sphere in a broad sense since it invites one to trace the history of human-lion relationship. However, it is possible to use amplification to move beyond the human sphere and learn about lioness by studying zoology, ecology, ethology, and wildlife management. Upon my return from South Africa, I did exactly that. I read numerous books and articles on lion society and lion behavior and watched as many videos as I could find. A Jungian analyst would agree: this is amplification. For me, it was more personal. I felt and feel an obligation to *magogo mafazi ngala*. She was a gift to me out of the dreaming, and I want to give something in return.

Part of what I give back is my time and dedication to learning about lions and my vow continually to seek ways of preserving these magnificent, endangered predators. I have already incorporated her story in my teaching and writing, and I will continue to speak on behalf of our animal kin. Although I feel *magogo mafazi ngala* close to my heart, I know that she belongs to the South African bush and has her own destiny, just as figures in a dream or vision belong in and to the dream. She is not mine; they are not mine. But we can visit awhile, like soul friends. Thus, part of what I give back is my deepest respect for lioness as a unique creature: her distinctive slow walk, the well-aimed gaze, her solitude, and her complete engagement with the path ahead, whatever it brings. I honor her with my entire bodymind by using somatic dreaming techniques to recapitulate her walk when I

move too fast and center my gaze when I am distracted. It is a way of being with lioness in the dreaming, a deep emotional and sensory embrace that collapses the physical distance between us. I call her my teacher.

### Contributor

Elizabeth Eowyn Nelson is core faculty at Pacifica Graduate Institute where she teaches courses in research, writing, archetypal psychology, and technology. She has been a professional editor and writing coach for more than 30 years. Elizabeth is the author of numerous scholarly articles and essays and has published two books, *The Art of Inquiry* (2017, Spring) co-authored with Joseph Coppin, and *Psyche's Knife* (2012, Chiron).

### References

- Adler, J. (1999). Who is the witness? My description of authentic movement. In P. Pallaro (Ed.), *Authentic movement* (pp. 141–159). Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Aizenstat, S. (2009). *Dream tending*. Spring Journal.
- Anderson, R. (1996). Nine psycho-spiritual characteristics of spontaneous and involuntary weeping. *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 28(2), 167–173.
- Bekoff, M. (2008). *The emotional lives of animals*. New World Library.
- Berndt, R. (1987). The dreaming. In M. Eliade (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of religion*, vol. 4 (pp. 479–81). Macmillan.
- Boyd, D. (1974). *Rolling Thunder*. Delta Books.
- Buzzell, L., & Chalquist, C. (Eds.) (2009). *Ecotherapy: Healing with nature in mind*. Counterpoint.
- Carson, R. (1962). *Silent spring*. Houghton Mifflin.
- Chodorow, J. (1997). *Dance therapy & depth psychology: The moving imagination*. Routledge.
- Coppin, J., & Nelson, E. (2017). *The art of inquiry: A depth psychological perspective* (3rd ed.). Spring Publications.
- Corbett, L. (1996). *The religious function of the psyche*. Routledge.
- DeMares, R., & Krycka, K. (1998). Wild animal-triggered peak experiences: Transpersonal aspects. *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 30(2), 161–177.
- Deslauriers, D. (2013). Dreaming and transpersonal psychology. In H. Friedman & G. Hartelius (Eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell handbook of transpersonal psychology*, (pp. 512–528). John Wiley & Sons.
- Freud, S. (1989). *The ego and the id*. (J. Strachey, Ed., J. Riviere, Trans.) W. W. Norton & Company. (Original work published 1960)
- Gendlin, E. (1981). *Focusing* (2nd ed.). Bantam.
- Grace, E. (2001). *The nature of lions: Social cats of the savannas*. Firefly Books.
- Grof, S. (1973). Theoretical and empirical basis of transpersonal psychology and psychotherapy: Observations from LSD research. *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 5(1), 15–53.

- Hanna, T. (1970). *Bodies in revolt: A primer in somatic thinking*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Hartelius, G., Rothe, G., & Roy, P. (2013). A brand from the burning. In H. Friedman & G. Hartelius (Eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell handbook of transpersonal psychology* (pp. 3–22). John Wiley & Sons.
- Hillman, J. (1975). *Re-visioning psychology*. HarperPerennial.
- Hillman, J. (1977). An inquiry into image. *Spring 1977*, 62–88.
- Hillman, J. (1978). Further notes on images. *Spring 1978*, 152–182.
- Hillman, J. (1979). *The dream and the underworld*. Harper & Row.
- Hillman, J. (1982). Anima mundi: The return of the soul to the world. *Spring 1982*, 71–85.
- Hillman, J. (1994). *Insearch: Psychology and religion* (rev. ed.). Spring Publications.
- Johnson, D. (1998). *The body in psychotherapy: Inquiries in somatic psychology*. North Atlantic Books.
- Jung, C. G. (1967). Commentary on “The secret of the golden flower” (R. F. C. Hull, Trans.). In H. Read et al. (Series Eds.), *The collected works of C. G. Jung* (Vol. 13, 2nd ed., pp. 1–55). Princeton University Press. (Original work published 1957)
- Jung, C. G. (1969). On the nature of the psyche (R. F. C. Hull, Trans.). In H. Read et al. (Series Eds.), *The collected works of C. G. Jung* (Vol. 8, 2nd ed., pp. 159–236). Princeton University Press. (Original work published 1954)
- Jung, C. G. (1970). *Mysterium coniunctionis* (R. F. C. Hull, Trans.). In H. Read et al. (Series Eds.), *The collected works of C. G. Jung* (Vol. 14, 2nd ed.). Princeton University Press. (Original work published 1955/6).
- Jung, C. G. (1971). Psychological types (R. F. C. Hull, Trans.). In H. Read et al. (Series Eds.), *The collected works of C. G. Jung* (Vol. 6). Princeton University Press. (Original work published 1921).
- Jung, C. G. (1973). *Letters, vol. 1* (G. Adler, Ed.). Princeton University Press.
- Jung, C. G. (1989). *Memories, dreams, reflections*. Vintage. (Original work published 1963)
- Jung, C. G. (2002). *The earth has a soul: C. G. Jung on nature, technology & modern life* (M. Sabini, Ed.). North Atlantic Books.
- Jung, C. G. (2009). *The red book. Liber novus: A reader’s edition* (S. Shamdasani, Ed., M. Kyburz, J. Peck, and S. Shamdasani, Trans.). W. W. Norton.
- Krippner, S. (1990.) Ancient and native peoples’ dreams. In S. Krippner (Ed.), *Dreamtime and dreamwork* (pp. 194–203). Tarcher.
- Krishnamurti, J. (1993). *On love and loneliness*. HarperCollins.
- Laski, M. (1961). *Ecstasy in secular and religious experiences*. Tarcher.
- Levine, P. (1997). *Waking the tiger: Healing trauma*. North Atlantic Books.
- Maslow, A. (1969). The farther reaches of human nature. *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 1(2), 1–9.



- Maslow, A. (1971). *The farther reaches of human nature*. Viking Press.
- McNaughton, I. (Ed.) (2004). *Body, breath, and consciousness: A somatics anthology*. North Atlantic Books.
- Moore, T. (1990). *The planets within: The astrological psychology of Marsilio Ficino*. Lindisfarne Press.
- Nelson, E. (2013). Writing as method: Depth psychological research and archetypal voice. *International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches*, 7(3), 324–336. <https://doi.org/10.5172/mra.2013.7.3.330>
- Neumann, E. (1983). *The great mother: An analysis of the archetype*. Princeton University Press. (Original work published 1955)
- Palmer, G., & Broad, W. (2002). Exceptional human experiences, disclosure, and a more inclusive view of physical, psychological, and spiritual well-being. *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 34(1), (29–59).
- Palmer, G., & Hastings, A. (2013). Exploring the nature of exceptional human experiences recognizing, understanding, and appreciating EHEs. In H. Friedman & G. Hartelius (Eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell handbook of transpersonal psychology* (pp. 333–352). John Wiley & Sons.
- Plotkin, B. (2007). *Nature and the human soul: Cultivating wholeness and community in a fragmented world*. New World Library.
- Raff, J. (1997). The ally. In D. Sandner & S. Wong (Eds.), *The sacred heritage: The influence of shamanism on analytical psychology* (pp. 111–121). Routledge.
- Roszak, T., Gomes, M., & Kanner, A. (Eds.) (1995). *Ecopsychology: Restoring the earth, healing the mind*. Counterpoint.
- Schaller, G. (1972). *The Serengeti lion: A study of predator-prey relations*. University of Chicago Press.
- Swan, J. A. (2010). Transpersonal psychology and the ecological conscience. *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 42(1), 2–25.
- Wilson, E. O. (1983). *Biophilia: The human bond with other species*. Harvard University Press.
- Wilson, E. O. (1993). Biophilia and the conservation ethic. In S. Kellert & E. O. Wilson (Eds.), *The biophilia hypothesis* (pp. 31–41). Island Press.
- White, R. A. (1998). Becoming more human as we work: The reflexive role of exceptional human experience. In W. Braud & R. Anderson (Eds.), *Transpersonal research methods for the social sciences* (pp. 128–145). Sage.
- Whitehouse, M. (1999a). Creative expression in physical movement is language without words. In P. Pallaro (Ed.), *Authentic movement* (pp. 33–40). Jessica Kingsley Publishers. (Original work published circa 1956)
- Whitehouse, M. (1999b). Physical movement and personality. In P. Pallaro (Ed.), *Authentic movement* (pp. 51–57). Jessica Kingsley Publishers. (Original work published 1963)
- Woodman, M., & Dickson, E. (1997). *Dancing in the flames*. Shambala.
- Yalom, I. (1989). *Love's executioner and other tales of psychotherapy*. Basic Books.