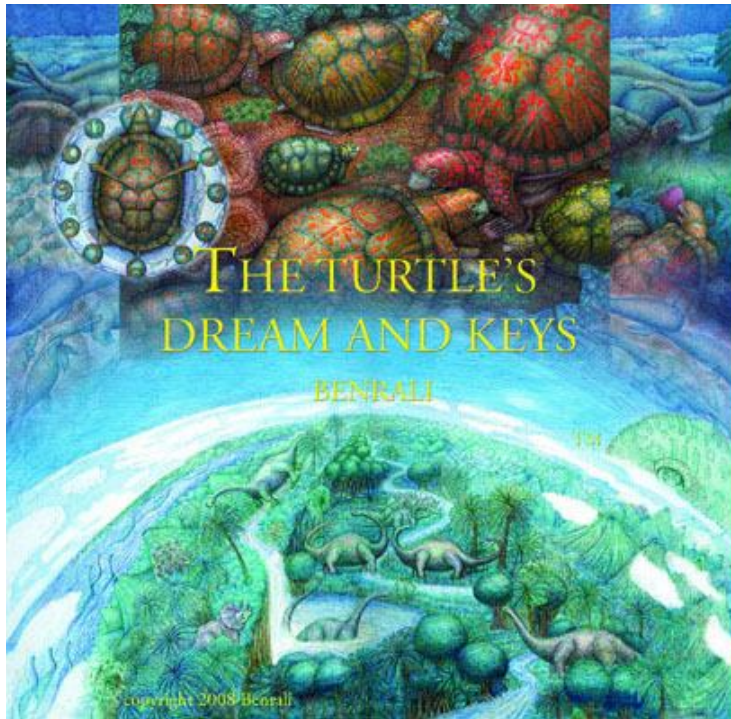

The Turtle's Dream and Keys

By Benrali



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Reviewed
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Benrali's *The Turtle's Dream and Keys* is a wonderful series of illustrations telling a story of creation with the glorification of an Eastern Box turtle in its colourful and mysterious history of evolution. The illustrations have been inscribed with short pieces of poetic prose or prose poems in the tradition of "Rembrandt/Albrecht Durer etchings"ⁱ. A short story writer, artist, poet and screenwriter, Benrali is a versatile man from Guyana, who graduated from Parsons School of Design. His original name is, however, Aman Waseem Ben Ali, half Hindu and half Muslim, whose ancestors had settled there during the colonial period from the Indian subcontinent. This information is important because in his work we find a conscious fusion of the eastern and the western artistic and cultural traditions. He sought inspiration in "Indian and Middle Eastern miniature paintings and illuminated manuscripts, especially the world famous Moghul miniatures. But being Guyanese he felt he didn't want his illustration to seem like copies of the Indian miniatures...so he pushed his work in a totally different area...which led him to researching Balinese rainforest paintings which were choked and teeming with all forms of life, Japanese woodcuts (Hokosai) and their strong usage of the diagonal and patterns to depict space, Amercian folk art, jungle scenes from Henri Rousseau's oil paintings, Gaugin's paintings and even Carnival art used in circuses."ⁱⁱ These are, however, are

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simply milestones of traditions having distant connections with Benrali's art and he has succeeded in creating a transcendental world through his exploration of primeval nature where human beings have no place. Benrali has added intertextual dimensions to his works by inscribing short verbal poems in prose, which, combined together, release swift wave of cultural codes forcing the reader/viewer to the next piece/s for almost an immersive experience.

The book owes its origin, as the artist informs, to the beauty of an Eastern Box Turtle introduced to him by his girlfriend whose premature death forced him "to put together a picture book...in a small way...[as] a tribute to her"ⁱⁱⁱ. Another shot of inspiration came to him after "a dream he had about the pattern one of his box turtles Jupiter, that looked like a skeleton key"^{iv}. Whatever the actual inspirations or compulsions might have been, Benrali drew upon numerous different artistic and cultural traditions and fused those into highly concentrated works of art with grave ecological concerns of our postdigital times.

The book begins with an archetypal theme from the fertility cult—the theme of death/sleep and resurrection in nature. Section I: "The Turtle Key" starts with an illustration of the Box Turtle waking up from hibernation and with minimalist prose the artist introduces the story:

"All winter Jupiter dreamed with earth, stones and gnomes, all winter under hyacinths and snow. But Spring has come and the winter must go. Now its time for my box turtle to break free, its time for Jupiter to see, time for him to feel sunlight on his cold shell."^v

The next five illustrations celebrate the multi-coloured patterns of the turtle on its back and the artist finds a mythical connection: "I imagine the gold patterns are poems elves have read for millions of years."^{vi} In the section II: "Jupiter Dreams" with the Box Turtle the artist journeys back to the prehistoric times: "...Jupiter is a wheel spinning through time...he can see all species and empires that have come and gone through time"^{vii} In one of the brilliant illustrations the artist explicitly links the turtle to the Iroquois legend which tells the story of the earth's creation on a turtle's back. But the artist also might have been by a story from Hindu mythology in which Lord Vishnu reincarnated himself as Kurma or a turtle. Again, in many cultures, turtles are honoured as preserver of memory and energy and the artist must have used this aspect in his presentation of the Box Turtle. Finally he concludes:

"I imagine Jupiter has a key to a place beyond time, a place where he can change from turtle to wings, from reptile to butterfly, from fossil energy to solar energy, a key to a place where anything can be changed."^{viii}

The book can be a perfect buy for any person of any profession and of any age-group—adults and children, and can prove to be an inspiration for some noble action.

Notes

ⁱ Lisa Ray, "Spotlight Interview with Benrali" (Biblio Reads, February 13, 2011).

<http://biblioreads.blogspot.com/2011/02/spotlight-interview-with-benrali.html>

ⁱⁱ Benrali, "About Me" page, (*DrEaMWorLdS BeYoNd TiMe*, <http://benralisfantasyworlds.com>).

http://benralisfantasyworlds.com/about_me

ⁱⁱⁱ Lisa Ray

^{iv} *The Turtle's Dream and Keys*

^v Ibid.

^{vi} Ibid.

^{vii} Ibid.

^{viii} Ibid.

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