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## Animals and Analysis: The Grimm's Tale "The Three Languages"

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*Thomas Elsner*

The Grimms' tale "The Three Languages" revolves around the common folklore trope of speaking the language of the animals, the psychological analysis of which forms the basis of this article. The folklore theme of learning to understand the sounds of animals is amplified by contemporary dreams of persons in analysis, Egyptian and African mythology, shamanism, Eastern yoga, folklore from around the world, Western alchemy, and Romantic poetry. A psychological perspective on this theme of human beings learning the nonhuman animal languages is suggested, one that centers on Jung's theory of the individuation process as the experience of the conscious ego living in relationship to the unconscious psyche, to the "spirit of the depths," as Jung wrote in *The Red Book*. In addition, there is a brief discussion of differences between the personalistic and archetypal approaches to the interpretation of fairy tales in the field of depth psychology. My hypothesis is that the motif of learning to speak with the animals, present not only in folklore but also in contemporary dreams, compensates for the rationalistic spirit of the times in the contemporary world by expressing the value of listening to, taking seriously, and acting upon the archetypal images and dynamics present in the soul.

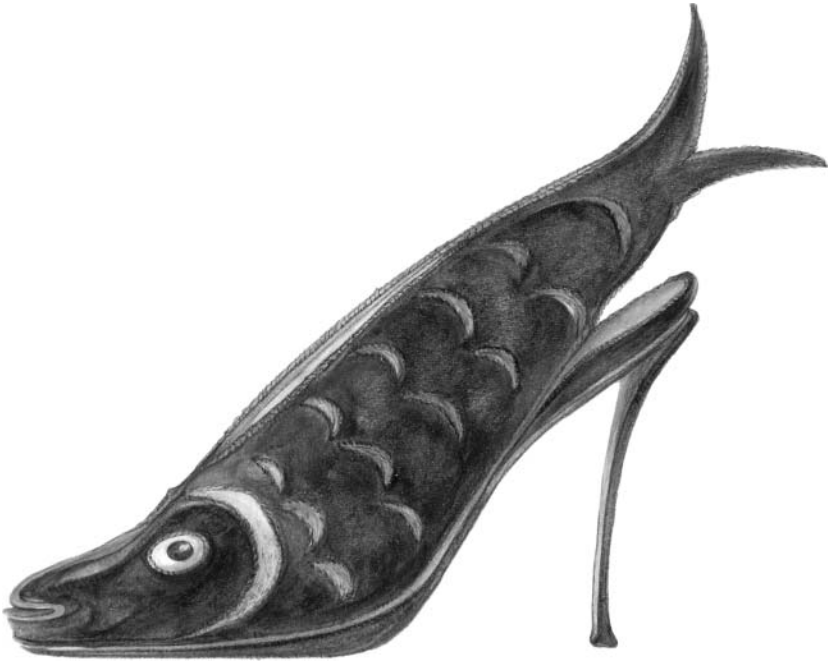
I asked him [Ochwiay Bianco, Pueblo chief] why he thought the whites were all mad.

"They say that they think with their heads," he replied.

"Why of course. What do you think with?" I asked him in surprise.

"We think here," he said, indicating his heart.

—Jung, 1989, p. 248



Sam Watters, *Untitled* (detail),  
watercolor on paper, 21.5 × 30 inches, 2006-7.

The spirit of the depths even taught me to consider my actions and my decisions as dependent on dreams. Dreams pave the way for life, and they determine you without you understanding their language. One would like to learn this language, but who can teach and learn it? Scholarliness alone is not enough; there is a knowledge of the heart that gives deeper insight. The knowledge of the heart is in no book and is not to be found in the mouth of any teacher, but grows out of you like the green seed from the dark earth. Scholarliness belongs to the spirit of this time, but this spirit in no way grasps the dream, since the soul is everywhere that scholarly knowledge is not.

—Jung, 2009, p. 233

*Das noch Altere ist immer die Neue.* ["The even older is always the new."]

—Wolfgang Pauli

Beginning my training as a Jungian analyst in Switzerland, I had a strange dream:

*X, one of my teachers, and I are discussing cases. X had learned, through very hard work, to understand the sounds of animals. I wondered if I also could learn this.*

It is as if the dream would say, "Your analytic training consists of learning to understand animal sounds." At the time this idea seemed not quite nonsensical, but close; it was enigmatic. Animals, analysis—what the connection might be escaped me. Not yet had I discovered how central to Jung's psychology this dream statement was. Only many years later would I find in Jung's writings passages such as the following:

Zarathustra is an archetype and therefore has the divine quality, and that is always based upon the animal. Therefore the gods are symbolized as animals; even the Holy Ghost is a bird, all the antique gods and the exotic gods are animals at the same time. The old wise man is a big ape really, which explains his peculiar fascination. The ape is naturally in possession of the wisdom of nature, like any animal or plant, but the wisdom is represented by a being that is not conscious of itself, and therefore cannot be called wisdom. For instance, the glow-worm represents the secret of making light without warmth; man doesn't know

how to produce 98% of light with no loss of warmth but the glow-worm has the secret. If the glow-worm could be transformed into a being who knew that he possessed the secret of making light without warmth, that would be a man with an insight and knowledge much greater than we have reached; he would be a great scientist perhaps or a great inventor, who would transform our present techniques. So the old wise man, in this case Zarathustra, is the consciousness of the wisdom of the ape; it is the wisdom of nature and that is nature itself, and if nature were conscious of itself, it would be a superior being of extraordinary knowledge and understanding. (Jung, 1935/1988, p. 1393)

If the gods are symbolized by animals, as Jung commented, then understanding the sounds of animals means understanding the god language; psychologically this refers to the capacity to understand and relate consciously to archetypal images, for instance, in dreams—which was one of the primary goals of my analytic training. The work of analysis, the dream seems to say, is to come into contact with the consciousness of the wisdom of the ape, the wisdom of nature itself, as distinct from the theories and preconceptions of the analyst.

A few years after this dream I was in the process of taking the first round of examinations, the *propaedeuticum*. One of my examining analysts, Gotthilf Isler, handed me the Grimms' tale "The Three Languages" and asked me to interpret it. I read of a young man who travels to a strange city and learns from celebrated masters to speak the languages of the dogs, frogs, and birds. This young man's father, an aged count in Switzerland, is so infuriated by this and so convinced that his son is utterly and hopelessly stupid, that he banishes him and gives orders that he be killed. But the old count's servants take pity on the son and allow him to wander free in the world. Because the son knows how to understand the animal languages, he is able to save a kingdom from an impossible problem involving wild dogs. He goes down into an old tower to confront a pack of wild dogs that are barking and howling without ceasing, occasionally devouring a human sacrifice, and speaks with them. They do not harm him but instead tell him, in their own language, that they are bewitched, and will continue to be so, until a chest of gold, over which they are standing guard, is retrieved. The youth follows their instructions about what to do and comes back with the chest of gold, setting both the town and the dogs free from the curse. At the end of the story the young count travels to Rome, listening to the frogs and doves along the way, and miraculously becomes the new pope.

As I read through this story, the main theme—understanding the sounds of the animals—vividly jumped out at me with a palpable sense of

recognition and immediately caught me in naïve identification. It was like a revelation: *This is my dream!* Had I not also, like the fairy tale hero, left my family of origin both physically and psychically, traveled to a strange city, and studied with teachers who understood the sounds of animals? I knew what this tale was about: The young count must have been training as a Jungian analyst! Moreover, because of the uncanny similarity between my dream and the fairytale, I fell into the distinct delusion that the examining analyst who selected this tale for me to work with had picked it *just for me* because he mysteriously knew about the unseen depths of my soul. By stumbling upon a fairytale that seemed to fit my strange dream exactly, it was impossible to avoid the uncanny impression that an archetypal narrative of animals and analysis was living *me*, in Jung's words, determining me without my creating or understanding it. The fairytale, which was an amplification of the dream, seemed to speak directly to my soul.

This was a compensatory experience for me, correcting an unconscious one-sidedness in my own ideas of what it meant to practice psychotherapy. But it also turned out to be much more than that. Through the fairytale, I began to deepen into the self—not the ego—but the self, learning about this self in its light and dark attributes, not as a scholar but as a human being who finds that there is an archetypal story living not in a book but in the self without his knowing it, and who falls in love with that story. Like all states of falling in love, this one also carries its shadow, one dimension of which is inflation: the ten-

dency, upon touching the archetypal layer of the psyche, to believe that one is experiencing a great truth that ought to be preached to others.

My work on "The Three Languages," without intending it, became a way of working through and becoming conscious of the archetypal background of my psyche, as well as my unconscious identification with this background. Fairytale interpretation is, in this sense, a process of self-discovery, an individuation process involving the participation of conscious and unconscious. I have come to believe that this type of engagement with the transferential field constellated around the fairytale as a genre is not extraneous but essential to understanding the psychological dimension of these tales. Yet I also had to wonder about my motivation to publish an article that I increasingly began to see as more or less an involuntary confession.

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Perhaps this is defensible if the confession is not idiosyncratic but archetypal. The healing influence of archetypal narrative, as von Franz pointed out in her book *The Interpretation of Fairy Tales* (1996), emerges only if we do not reduce it to something personal. Von Franz wrote:

The heroes or heroines of fairy tales are abstractions—that is, in our language, archetypes. Therefore, their fates are not neurotic complications, but rather are expressions of the difficulties and dangers given to us by nature. In a personalistic interpretation, the very healing element of an archetypal narrative is nullified. For example, the hero-child is nearly always abandoned in fairy tales. If one then interprets his fate as the neurosis of an abandoned child, one ascribes to it the neurotic family novel of our time. If, however, one leaves it embedded within its archetypal context, then it takes on a much deeper meaning, namely that the new God of our time is always to be found in the ignored and deeply unconscious corner of the psyche (Christ's birth in the stable). (p. viii)

Von Franz argues here that personalistic interpretations of archetypal narratives nullify their healing effect and obscure their deeper meaning. We will return to this idea.

### AMPLIFYING THE ANIMALS

Jung's method of amplification, which is a way of circling around archetypal images and gathering cultural and mythological parallels to them, is a means of understanding an approach to fairytales that does not extract their imagery from its archetypal context but rather focuses on their transpersonal and collective dimension, which is really a way of amplifying their *value*. In this way the image is not silenced, but rather encouraged to continue to speak, perhaps telling us something we did not know or suspect in advance—"as if," von Franz wrote, "something were known in the form of images, but not by us" (as cited in Abt, 2005, epigram, p. 8). Amplification involves symbolic thinking, a way of turning up the volume by seeing the image from different perspectives and allowing the image to speak for itself before the ego attempts an interpretation.

One can amplify dreams with fairytales, but one can also amplify fairytales with dreams, and that is because the fairytales *are* dreams, not personal dreams but the not-yet-understood archetypal dreams of a culture. They are dreams and visions that are told over and over again out of sense of fascination and collective relevance, like recurring dreams, like Coleridge's Ancient

Mariner telling his tale over and over, perhaps seeking someone who might understand.

People today continue to have dreams that contain this folklore trope of speaking animals, sometimes even the specific motif of going down to the wild dogs, just as the fairytale hero does—with varying degrees of success! A middle-aged man at the beginning of his analysis had such a dream, one that rather closely parallels “The Three Languages.” He was sunk in a deep depression and had the following dream as he was beginning to give active attention to his symptoms:

*I walked into a cave at the beach on my right-hand side. The cave was fairly small, but at the back of the cave was a large dark wolf figure. It was huge—bigger than a man. I knew I must make friends with this creature. It was scary looking in that it had large teeth, but it wasn't aggressive with me, and I didn't feel scared of it. I approached it, and it started to lick my hand. Up to that point it seemed totally animal, but then it began to speak and to possess a great intelligence and numinosity.*

“The Three Languages” reveals what this man’s dream also reveals, what neither this dreamer nor Western culture adequately understands: namely, that the unconscious animal, the source of impossible conflicts and destruction, bewildering and uncanny, is at the same time prescient, aware, capable, and willingly befriended—if we make the active attempt to befriend it and don’t panic. That is the capacity that the dummiling hero in “The Three Languages” displays in spades. He can listen; he understands the order and meaning in the unconscious soul and therefore does not panic when he encounters this dark night-world. And this ability is unusual, to say the least.

This man’s dream, like “The Three Languages,” depicts the spirit of the depths that Jung sounded in *The Red Book*, a revelation of the new god that is present in the voice of the animal. “The night before her [his mother’s] death,” wrote Jung, “I had a frightening dream”:

I was in a dense, gloomy forest; fantastic, gigantic boulders lay about among huge jungle-like trees. It was a heroic, primeval landscape. Suddenly I heard the piercing whistle that seemed to resound through the whole universe. My knees shook. Then there was a crashing in the underbrush, and a gigantic wolfhound with a fearful, gaping maw burst forth. At the sight of it, the blood froze in my veins. It tore past me, and I suddenly knew: the Wild Huntsman had commanded it to carry away a human soul. I woke



in deadly terror, and the next morning I received the news of my mother's death. Upon superficial consideration it seemed to say that the devil had fetched her. But to be accurate, the dream said that it was the Wild Huntsman, the "*Grünhüttl*" or Wearer of the Green Hat, who hunted with his wolves that night. . . . It was Wotan, the god of my Alemannic forefathers, who had gathered my mother to her ancestors—negatively to the "wild horde," but positively to the "*sälig lüt*," the blessed folk. It was the Christian missionaries who made Wotan into a devil. In himself he is an important god—a Mercury or Hermes . . . a nature spirit who returned to life again in the Merlin of the Grail legend and became, as the *spiritus Mercurialis*, the sought-after arcanum of the alchemists. (Jung, 1989, p. 313)

Both pagan and Christian, Jung finds in this nature spirit, reborn in alchemy and Merlin and now his own mission. The fairytale as a genre is the announcement of this new god, who is the old god reborn, "a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi," as Yeats wrote in *The Second Coming*:

And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,  
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born? (Yeats, 2000, p. 76)

As in "The Three Languages," the rough beast in this man's dream speaks, transforming from a diabolical to a symbolical figure, from a devouring threat

to a helpful guide, from the purely emotional experience of a dangerous depression to an image of depression with a voice, as the dreamer turns towards it with an active and open attitude. This dream wolf (all dogs are descendents of the wolf) said the most amazing and surprising things to the dreamer, secrets that gave

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If taken seriously, images like the ones in this dream could become the basis of a new cultural attitude, a new mythology or vision of life.

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life to his analysis and held the quality of the sacred, but these secrets are just that, secret—not to be talked about to others or published. We never learn exactly what the hero in "The Three Languages" did in the darkness of the old tower, how he brought up the chest of gold, or what the dogs told him.

A woman in her early 30s had the following dream in analysis:

*I was in a large body of water, probably the ocean. I was swimming with you [the analyst]. We were looking through-out the water for newspaper photos and magazine photos of people and animals. You told me to imagine these photos as if both the animals and the people were wearing masks. You wanted me to tell you what they looked like under their masks. You also wanted me to tell you what they had to say to me. I saw that the animals had human faces under the masks, and the humans had animal faces under their masks.*

In this mysterious dream, the meaning of which transcended the dreamer's conscious associations, the humans have animal faces under their masks and the animals have human faces under their masks. The theme is as old as the earliest cave paintings. An African Bushman, not this young Southern Californian, could have had this dream. It is normal in indigenous culture to view animals and human beings as interchangeable. This is a motif, as well, in countless folktales (e.g., the frog that conceals a prince) as well as in the myths of cultures that contain imagery of half-animal, half-human deities (e.g., ancient Egyptian deities). There is an animal underneath the human persona—yes, we can understand that, Freud can understand that—but what does it mean, psychologically, that there is something like a human being underneath the mask of the animal? That's a little trickier for the modern Westerner to understand.

If taken seriously, images like the ones in this dream could become the basis of a new cultural attitude, a new mythology or vision of life. On the outer level they could rejuvenate our lost connection with "the deeply sensitive, highly intelligent and self-aware" nonhuman persons with which humans share this planet, as a recent magazine article about the film *The Cove* suggested (Methner, 2010, p. 5). On the inner psychic level, recognizing the human face behind the animal mask would represent a renewed capacity to listen to the intelligence of nature as it appears in dream, vision, and story, in our hunches and our bodies, even in our symptoms and illnesses. But first we would have to value the images of dreams as being something other than noise, and this is where amplification might be a starting point. We would have to learn something about mythology in order to stop projecting our own ignorance onto the dream or onto the fairytale, seen as a collective dream.

When I had the dream about understanding animal sounds, the motif seemed to me quaint, if not nonsensical. I did not know that it is actually archaic, ancient, and cross-culturally something of the highest value. "All over the world," Eliade observed, "learning the language of animals, especially of birds, is equivalent to knowing the secrets of nature and hence being able to prophecy" (2004, p. 98). From Paleolithic times forward the shaman has

been the one who can speak to these animals/gods, not only outside but also within the dream, where they also appear, and this is what gives the shaman the power to heal. The animal is the connection to the spirit world, its language a “variant of ‘spirit language,’ the secret shamanic tongue” (2004, p. 93). Similarly, in the 3,500-year-old Egyptian *Amduat*, a depiction of the voyage of the sun god through the underworld, the sun god is called an interpreter of the netherworld; he can speak and understand its secret language, which to human ears seems like the buzzing of bees, the screeching of tom cats, and the roaring of bulls. Like the hero in “The Three Languages” who goes down to the wild dogs, speaks with them, and then returns to the upper world with a chest of gold, the Egyptian sun god “always can enter and leave the netherworld. Always speaking to the living ones” (Abt & Hornung, 2005, p. 145). And through this ability to speak with the animals and ancestors in the underworld, he returns to the upper world as the reborn sun. In Egyptian mythology, as in the alchemical tradition that arose from any theology, sun and gold are identical (Abt & Hornung, 2005). This ability to, first, understand nonhuman animal sounds as language, and then, second, to successfully translate that language into terms that are compatible with the culture of the times, makes the hero in the folktale, like the Egyptian sun god, a model for a human ego that can safely relate to the unconscious.

Arnold Mindell wrote that the Eastern yogin “knows the cries of all creatures,” and he interpreted this as referring to consciousness of the dreaming state and awareness of the inner voices of one’s own mind and body:

According to the Yoga Sutras, the “yogin knows the cries of all creatures.” . . . This is the sentient experience of Samadhi . . . the “cries of all creatures” heard in this hypometabolic state are the inner voices or signals or one’s own mind and body that appear when internal dialogue and normal consciousness are turned off. . . . [This refers to] dreaming . . . however, the white snake [a reference to the Grimms’ tale “The White Snake”] refers to a consciousness of the dreaming state in which one is fully alert and awake. (1998, p. 210)

In the fairytale that Mindell references, Grimms’ “The White Snake,” a king is renowned for his wisdom. A servant takes a bite of the king’s secret meal, a white snake, and is then able to understand the sounds of all the animals. He becomes conscious, not of his own ego thoughts (nor of philosophical or psychological theories!), but of the great dream, Paracelsus’ *lumen naturae*, the *anima mundi*, a numinous and impersonal layer of soul that is different

from, but still related to, the personal layer. Lame Deer, a Lakota holy man, described the experience:

Sounds came to me through the darkness: the cries of the wind, the whisper of the trees, the voices of nature, animal sounds, the hooting of an owl . . . slowly I perceived that a voice was trying to tell me something. It was a bird cry, but I tell you, I began to understand some of it. That happens sometimes. I know a lady who had a butterfly sitting on her shoulder. That butterfly told her things. This made her become a great medicine woman. (Halifax, 1979, p. 74)

Lame Deer does exactly what the hero in "The Three Languages" does: He understands the sounds of animals, in this case, of the bird. In the "*It seemed to say*" the "*as if*"—we witness a thinking that takes place outside of the split between literal truth and delusion. A kind of subtle body emerges with Lame Deer's experience that lies between the world of reality and ideas. That is the soul, the object that reappeared in the 20th century as the object of depth psychology, neither literal truth nor hallucination, but a psychological *logos* that is not personal and is not identical to consciousness. The fairytale expresses the *logos* of the soul as the language of the animals, and it is not insignificant to note in this context that the word *animal* derives from the word for soul in Latin: *anima*. Keats gave expression to the language of the *anima(l)* in his *Ode to a Nightingale*:

Darkling I listen; and, for many a time  
 I have been half in love with easeful Death,  
 Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,  
 To take into the air my quiet breath;  
 Now more than ever seems it rich to die,  
 To cease upon the midnight with no pain,  
 While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad  
 In such an ecstasy!  
 Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—  
 To thy high requiem become a sod.

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!  
 No hungry generations tread thee down;  
 The voice I hear this passing night was heard  
 In ancient days by emperor and clown:  
 Perhaps the self-same song that found a path  
 Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,

She stood in tears amid the alien corn;  
 The same that oft-times hath  
 Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam  
 Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn. (Keats, 1951,  
 p. 290)

For Keats, the nightingale speaks of immortal, archetypal themes—the allure of death, the longing for home. The voice of the bird is the revelation of an unconscious psychic background. By studying with celebrated masters for three years the young count in our tale becomes conversant with this background, this *logos* of the *anima(l)*, and therefore becomes a *psychologist* in the true sense of the word, acquiring psychological knowledge understood as knowledge *in* the soul, “an account that genuinely bespeaks the soul’s nature and concerns” (Hillman, 2008, p. 2), as distinct from knowledge *about* the soul, or knowledge *of* the soul. The knowledge *in* the soul is a type of knowledge left by the wayside in the one-sidedly rational development of Western consciousness (the aged count).

What would it be like to live close to the nonhuman animal and wrap oneself in its voice? This is the way of individuation, as von Franz understood it from Jung: Psychology as life, not a philosophy or a theory but an experience, “no longer living with the reasonableness of the ego and its decisions but living with the ego embedded in a flow of psychic life which expresses itself in symbolic form and requires symbolic action. . . . Instead of deciding out of ego considerations, you wait for a hunch from the unconscious and let it have a say in the matter” (1996, p. 70). This is what the hero in “The Three Languages” does easily and naturally. In actuality it is quite challenging to follow this path. But here I should really speak only for myself.

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There is nothing more vital and meaningful than living out of the instinctual basis of one’s soul. At the same time, listening to the voice of nature in distinction to the conventional voice of what one ought to do, or what is usually done, or what is merely reasonable, takes us off the well-traveled cow trails where, venturing into untrodden territory, we might fall off a

cliff or get lost. “Many have perished in our work,” the alchemists remind us. When I am driving my truck off-road, I am always very happy if there are

tire tracks in the ground that I can follow; others have been there before me and probably have found a way through. Nevertheless, some of us have an impulse to go off the collective track, both literally and symbolically, as if following some wild voice. As Laurens van der Post wrote:

The spirit of man is Nomad, his blood Bedouin  
 And love is the Aboriginal tracker on the faded desert spoor of his  
 lost self.  
 And so I came to live my life, not by conscious plan or prear-  
 ranged design,  
 But by following the flight of a bird. (van der Post, 1987, p. 1)

Van der Post put it very well. Following the flight of the bird is a folk-tale motif, and the so-called dummling is the one who can do it. It is a path tracked by Eros, not power, by poetic faith, not intellect. But this is a particularly difficult path for us typical modern Westerners. For one, we are regular people and not fairytale archetypes, and for another, we are a people who, as a culture, are far from both inner and outer nature as it is. We have no cultural containers or guiding mythologies to help us here. Sometimes the bird can fly too high for us. The animal's knowing is not our conscious knowledge, does not belong to the ego, so it may seem nonsensical or even crazy. *Ein vogel hat*, "He has a bird," means in German that someone is crazy; following the flight of a bird, the autonomous spirit of nature, can be either inspiring or psychotic, or both—or perhaps the psychosis is necessary for the inspiration. The ego knows so little and is easily broken. We are fragile vessels. The tiger that bristles with energy, vitality, and life also has claws that can hook into our skin and fangs that can devour us. Indeed, to be symbolically flayed, torn to pieces, and devoured belongs to the archetypal pattern of shamanic initiation (Halifax, 1982). Here the ego must be overwhelmed by the self, not as a pathological state but as a process of transformation.

Fairytale animals, like animals in dreams, can be ruthless, saying things that are often completely at variance with common sense and conventional morality. They can be Wotanic, Mercurial, even tricking the hero or heroine into behaving in accordance with their intentions, or demanding brutal acts of seeming violence and murder, which are all part of the plan. Positively, the voices of the sacred animal protect us from the delusions and seductions of the persona world, whispering or guiding or howling out at us with what is true within the depths of our own and the world's being. Yet negatively these numinous archetypal images can devour us, as in the werewolf motif or the many fairytale curses and bewitchments in which a human being is *turned into* a nonhuman animal, making it difficult to smoothly adapt to conventional social norms or, worse, eclipsing the ego completely, as in psychotic

states in which people often believe and act as if they *are* animals. It is up to the ego, as Jung pointed out long ago, to wrestle with the animal nature of the divine power until it gives us a blessing, and this *auseinandersetzung* with the unconscious demands strong ego boundaries. From the psychological point of view it also demands, as Ross Woodman put it, a poetic faith in the symbolic imagination that often seems to be completely absent in a contemporary Western world increasingly concerned only with statistical truths and literal facts. "One would like to learn this language," Jung wrote in *The Red Book*, "but who can teach and learn it?" (2009, p. 233).

And then, on top of all this, there is the aged count who is in us all the time, convinced that all this work of relating to the archetypal dimensions of the soul is *useless* and reminding us of that constantly when we write down a dream or begin active imagination. How can we respond to him? We can just agree. The sacred things *are* useless. "When I begged him [a Zulu chief and prophet] to speak of the first spirit of the Zulu nation, Umkulunkulu, the Great One," Laurens van der Post wrote, "he shook his beautiful old head and said with infinite sadness, "We do not speak of Umkulunkulu any longer. His praise-names are forgotten. People now talk only of things that are useful to them" (1961, p. 141). If he wanted to recover his soul again, Jung was forced to admit that he had to accept the Child in himself. This insight led to a conscious engagement with the animal spirit of the depths and the observation that, because it complemented the persona, the anima gave rise to images that the ego assumed to be worthless or even crazy. Jung's confrontation with these images was a defeat for his ego because they relativized his assumption of ego dominance and destroyed his conventional dreams of success (2009). It had to be that way. Typically those fairytale characters that only want to use the unconscious for some egocentric purpose go completely wrong. "Psychology is Useless; or It Should Be," Robert Romanyshyn entitled an essay (2000). Our desire to have everything conform to our egocentric idea of what is useful all the time is just a power attitude, the mistake of the alchemist who sought to make literal gold. Purposiveness is really an insidious modern tendency. It evolved and reached a peak in the human species, but it is a way of thinking that is necessarily egocentric and that today has noticeably devastating collective repercussions on society and the natural environment as well as the psychological alienation from the self that I am emphasizing at the moment. They are both the same thing.

Van der Post's way of playing life by ear requires a kind of extreme humbleness in order not to become identified, magically inflated, or possessed. The dumpling hero in "The Three Languages" time and again displays this quality of humbleness. He never uses the non-ego for his own purposes. "Nature never did betray the heart that loved her" William Wordsworth effused. For the dumpling hero this adage seems to be true;

the young count relates to the *anima(l)*, and it becomes a personality that he can rely on rather than a seduction. However, we must again remember, the Child of nature is not a human being but an archetypal pattern, the *Puer Aeternus*. Wordsworth, in his finer moments of poetic inspiration in the first half of life, may have identified with him and split off the *Senex*. Then, in middle age and beyond, that *Puer* identification constellated the *Senex*, and the poet became conventional.

Perhaps this is also the case today; for instance, we find it in the depth psychological tradition as a tension between the personalistic and archetypal schools, or between the depth psychological tradition itself and the voices of the dominant culture. I would like to briefly address this tension. Jung addressed it directly in *The Red Book* as the confrontation between the spirit of the times and the spirit of the depths, and it is this tension that I see personified in the relationship between the father and son in "The Three Languages." My comments will necessarily be limited and certainly not exhaustive.

To return to von Franz's comment near the beginning of this article about the healing effect of archetypal narratives, the point is that the fairy-tale as a genre addresses the self, not the ego. The healing effect of reading these tales is that they connect consciousness to the unconscious primal imagination (the heart), from which consciousness (the head) is continuously, inexorably, and necessarily alienated. Because they are descriptive of deep processes at work in human nature, and because one, if not the, most primal dimension of our nature, like that of any living organism, is survival, the tales can also show an individual ego a way through typical difficulties in life. The archetypal dimension of the psyche has a prospective, guiding function that humanity has always and everywhere depended upon for continued existence and creative development. Von Franz discovered this in folklore; in the hundreds and hundreds of folktales she had read from all over the globe, she found only one universal dogma, so to speak: The characters that act in accordance with the intention of the helpful animal always go right. The guidance of the animal can be ignored or disregarded for a time, but the figures that continuously disobey or kill the helpful animal always go wrong.

If this is true, then why are personalistic approaches so popular in the field of depth psychology? Many reasons come to mind. For one, personalistic interpretations speak *our* language. They accurately describe our contemporary problems and resonate with our conscious selves, and clinicians easily recognize the issues they describe in the symptoms and dynamics observable in 21st-century Western patients. These types of interpretations speak out of the spirit of the times as distinct from the spirit of the depths and are therefore more readily accessible to contemporary consciousness.



Second, without perhaps consciously realizing or intending it, reducing the self to the demands of the ego has the effect of strengthening the ego in opposition to the self, which is often a necessary therapeutic and developmental task. In the Egyptian *Book of Thoth* the language of the nonhuman animal is depicted as the language of the gods and viewed as dangerous knowledge, too powerful for a human being to possess. The mythology reflects an archetypal tension between the ego and the self, with an experience of the self being a defeat for the ego, at the very least, and always carrying with it the inevitability of inflation. Third, it may be that many psychologists simply lack a sufficiently broad background in the humanities to engage the mythological, poetic, and cultural dimensions of the motifs. We see

what we know. When it comes to archetypal narratives we need to know mythology so that we can begin to understand these images on their own terms.

In this respect, Joseph Campbell pointed out in his commentary for *The Complete Grimm's Fairy Tales*, that the contemporary West no longer understands the "image-language" of the soul except as madness:

Folk tales are phrases from an image-language, expressive of metaphysical, psychological, and sociological truth. And in the primitive, oriental, archaic, and medieval societies this vocabulary was pondered over and more or less understood. Only in the wake of the Enlightenment has it suddenly lost its meaning and been pronounced insane. (Grimm, 1944, p. 861)

Campbell's comment that the image-language of the soul (language of the animals) has lost its meaning in the wake of the Enlightenment corresponds to the attitude of the aged count in "The Three Languages." He personifies

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The identification of imagination with madness . . . is also an important development in Western consciousness that paved the way for the emergence of depth psychology's 20th-century interpretation of imagination as expressive of psychological truth, as distinct from religious revelation.

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this tendency; he declares imagination to be insane. The identification of imagination with madness is not merely a mistake; it is also an important development in Western consciousness that paved the way for the emergence of depth psychology's 20th-century interpretation of imagination as expressive of psychological truth, as distinct from religious revelation. We will come back to this point.

For now, we can agree that most contemporary educated Westerners do not understand the language of the archetypal imagination anymore, nor do most even know that there is anything *to* understand. One of the infinitely sad problems of our times is that we look into the basket of the divine *anima* and find nothing, only darkness, or perhaps only the pale mirror of our conscious theorizing. I am thinking of Laurens van der Post's (1961, pp. 141–145) beautiful retelling of a story he heard as a child in South Africa, in which a man looks into a basket given to him by his wife, who is from the stars. When he looks inside, he sees nothing at all. The wife comes back and asks what he saw in the basket. When he scoffingly tells her, "Nothing!" she turns away with deep sadness, never to return. She had put beautiful gifts in the basket for him from the stars.

Our contemporary incapacity to recognize and comprehend the archetypal dimension of the psyche is not only characteristic of a historical development particular to the post-Enlightenment West, as Campbell suggests. There seems to be a more widespread patriarchal desire to *not* understand the archetypal imagination. That refusal is rooted in the incest taboo, symbolically understood as the prohibition against intercourse with the maternal dimension of the psyche. Edinger expressed this phenomenon as "the profound patriarchal antipathy toward the image-making powers of the psyche, the imagination, which has its roots in the maternal unconscious" (1975, p. 51). My fourth point in attempting to understand the popularity and meaning of personalistic interpretation is based on this "patriarchal antipathy" towards the archetypal imagination. Perhaps this explains, in part, why folklore from many cultures around the world states that the gift of understanding animal sounds, sometimes given as the most precious of all gifts by a serpent or by God, must be kept secret and not revealed to anyone under penalty of death. The secret is almost always betrayed in some way, often because the man who holds this secret is not resolute enough to resist the haranguing of his wife to reveal it. From the psychological perspective the man who is close to the feminine dimension of nature typically experiences the patriarchal antipathy as coming from the animus of the woman. The motif of the wife hounding the husband to betray his secret bond with the animal is found in folktales from India, Sri Lanka, Persia, Palestine, Serbia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Denmark, and Italy, among other cultures (Ashliman, 2010).

These might be some of the reasons that the language of the soul tends to be replaced by the language of the ego today. Yet, to return to “The Three Languages,” it is the tension between the two perspectives in the story—the violent conflict between the spirit of the times and the spirit of the depths—which generates all the movement and action. I would like to suggest that experiencing the conflict between the archetypal and personal perspectives is what might generate a way forward, as opposed to splitting them or devaluing one perspective in favor of the other. It is not only that both the personal and archetypal layers of the psyche are important in their own spheres and should be recognized as such, but something more than that: Their violent confrontation is necessary to the generation of a third perspective, which brings a new way of understanding archetypal imagery, a psychological way of understanding it as neither religious revelation nor literal delusion. The aged count—the post-Enlightenment identification of the imagination with madness that Campbell described—was not a detour or a wrong turn or only a crime against the sacred. The post-Enlightenment reduction of the soul to madness was essential to the development of depth psychology. As madness, the soul began its return from the heights of religious projection to the depths of the psychological self.

For example: I experienced that dream in Switzerland about understanding the sounds of animals, as well as the fairytale that became an amplification of that dream, as a numinous revelation. Such an experience tends inevitably to confuse the distinction between ego and self and to bring about inflation, noticeable, for instance, in the desire to preach to others. A purely personalistic interpretation of that experience consciously or unconsciously addresses this problem by rejecting the experience as revelation and reducing it in some way, shape, or form to madness or delusion. The aged count in “The Three Languages,” the spirit of the times, rejects the revelation as it appears in his son. Yet in the tale the rejection of the spirit of the depths by the spirit of the times is necessary to the continuing unfolding of the spirit of the depths as a function of renewal for the spirit of the times. The subtlety of “The Three Languages” hints at this: The aged count despises the animals, but behind his own back, so to speak, sends the boy off to learn the same animal sounds that he consciously devalues, and then, by seeking to murder his son sends him into the world to fulfill his destiny. Their “opposition is true friendship,” as Blake wrote.

In the personalistic rejection of revelation as madness, the soul does not at all disappear; rather it takes a first step out of the realm of religious revelation and into the realm of psychology, where it can continue to be worked and processed instead of preached. What appears in “The Three Languages” as the story of an attempt to kill the child who bears the revelations of nature

is part of the development of a historical process of the transformation of consciousness. I suggest that it remains for us working in the field of depth psychology today to continue this process. In 20th-century European depth psychology the soul began to find a place for itself outside the revelation–delusion dichotomy or the religion–rationality dichotomy, a third space that in *The Red Book* Jung called neither *sense* nor *nonsense*, but “*Übersinn*”: *beyond-sense*, a term translated by *The Red Book* translators into English as “supreme meaning.” Ross Woodman, masterfully tracking the development of *Übersinn* through the medium of Romantic poetry, referred to the dramatic truth of delusion that becomes accessible through poetic as distinct from religious faith and is experienced by the ego as the sanity of madness (Woodman, 2005). Depth psychology’s capacity to recognize the archetypal dimension of the psyche as madness, at the same time as it continues to affirm that madness as archetypal, differentiates it from its religious and rationalistic ancestry. Psychological awareness of what was religiously understood as *divine madness* both sobers the ego to the dangers of inflation that necessarily arise from a living experience of archetypal images and at the same time keeps the ego in living contact with the self.

In his aloneness, and especially in the darkness of impossible pathologies, the hero in “The Three Languages” communes with otherness and translates its language into the language of his times. Because he can do this, he, like the Egyptian sun god in the *Amduat*, brings up the gold, the reborn sun, new ways of seeing and lost values that contribute to both individual and cultural renewal. By listening to the animals and following *their logos*, as distinct from his, the young count reestablishes a balance between civilization (consciousness) and nature (the unconscious) that frees both civilization and nature from their curse (wild dogs).

## CLOSING THOUGHTS

The union of the day and the night worlds depicted in “The Three Languages” was the work of alchemy. Whereas the practice of alchemy in Europe was almost exclusively a province of the educated elite, the folktale depicted the alchemical transformation process in a form that was accessible to everyone. The alchemical tradition, in fact, insinuated itself right at the start of this tale, when the young count went to a strange city to learn from “celebrated masters,” and it continued throughout the tale like a red thread. The sense of a *lumen naturae* (an intelligence in nature), the motif of bringing up the sun or gold from the underworld, as well as the transformation of Senex and Puer, the old king and the new king—these are all central images in alchemy. The similarity of motifs also holds for the ending of the tale, which

seems to describe the possibility, or unconscious collective desire, that the split traditions in Europe—maternal pagan and patriarchal Christian—might be united. When the nature Puer becomes the new pope, this is an example of the pagan–Christian, unconscious–conscious union that Jung saw in the legend of Merlin and in the alchemical *Mercurius Duplex* (Jung, 1989, p. 228) and that in *The Red Book* appears as a confrontation of the spirit of the times with the spirit of the depths.

A dialogue with nature, not as object but as source—*Physis, Die Natur*—is urgently needed today. The very idea, however, is dismissed as absurd, heretical, useless, nostalgic, romantic, unrealistic, and primitive by the spirit of the times. The folktale compensates for this one-sided cultural bias by turning our attention back to an animistic connection to nature that was left by the wayside in the name of scientific and intellectual progress and that needs to be reinvestigated and taken seriously today, not as divine revelation (“O brightest! though too late for antique vows, / Too, too late for the fond believing lyre” Keats wrote in his *Ode to Psyche*) but as psychology (“I see, and sing, by my own eyes inspired. . . . Yes, I will be thy priest, and build a fane / In some untrodden region of my mind”). Keats’s vision of building a temple to the goddess Psyche, in an untraveled region of the mind, can be understood in depth psychological language as a process of becoming conscious of the anima as a living presence in the unconscious and hence of objective psychic reality per se. *Ode to Psyche* expresses the essentially psychological opus as a religious opus located within the poet’s “untrodden mind” and inspired by his “own eyes.”

This can be seen as a process of becoming conscious of the anima. The soul reappeared to Western psychoanalysis in the context of the breakdown of religious tradition initially as hysteria, as madness, the voice of a talented psychopath. And still today the process of becoming aware of the existence of a counter-pole to the conscious personality, a consciousness in the unconscious, appears to the modern Western perspective to be a regressive, unscientific, unintellectual, and even crazy process. Paradoxically, the tale says, taking a step backwards is the way to the future. It is redemptive and it works. The dummiling who returns to the language of the *anima(l)* is actually a hero and not an idiot. “The even older is always the new,” wrote Wolfgang Pauli.

The dream with which I opened this article and that opened me to the writing of this article pictured my training in Jungian analysis as learning to understand, through very hard work, the sounds of animals. Those of us in the contemporary world who take the dubious step of listening seriously to the voice of the archetypal imagination and who attempt to follow this voice into life might find in this simple tale encouragement and validation and also, perhaps, a myth that still speaks to us today.

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