

The Key to the Secret

*An Exploration of the Image of Secrets in Dreams and Fairytales,
and of the Importance of Secrets in Analytical Psychology*

Part 1: *The Secret*

The years we spend in childhood are shrouded in mystery, not only from the perspective of later life, when we look back into “the dark backward and abysm of time,” as Prospero says in *The Tempest*; but even, and especially, when we are living through them. Because the world - the human, animal and natural world - around us, holds so much that is unknown, and our own inner world in equal measure, secrets are the stuff of childhood. Everything is a game of hide-and seek, and we ourselves are as much the secret to be discovered as any place or object our curiosity eagerly pursues. We all remember the excitement of discovery, whether it is the strange-coloured pebble, the fragile shell, or the bird’s nest hidden in the leaves. And then the even greater excitement of secrets shared, or withheld, of treasures hidden and jealously guarded. We all have our memories of Blind Man’s Buff, of Hide and Seek, of Hunt the Thimble, of the Treasure Map, of hunting for Easter Eggs, of the Christmas stocking, of the neatly wrapped parcel. Many of us have followed, with bated breath, the Famous Five as they explored the Secret Passage. Who does not remember searching for some imagined treasure in the wardrobe, the chest of drawers, or mother’s handbag?

There is, too, the dismay and grief when by some mischance our secrets are discovered by others. And, finally, there is the strange, stomach-churning feeling of the guilty secret, and the possibility of its imminent discovery. We learn in childhood that a secret can be the most wonderful and exciting thing in life, and at the same time the most terrible. We are aware, too, that at times we must tell our secrets, and at times conceal them. The energy held in the secret is what drives our whole existence. The secret is the dynamo that propels our libido, by evoking our curiosity and desire. But it may also be the source of our deepest shame and public humiliation. We carry our secrets with us all our life: some we may always be aware of, or may have at the back of our minds; some we may have forgotten, but may remember if something happens to jog our memory- like Proust, and the taste of the madeleine, releasing a whole world of the past. Some secrets may be so deeply repressed that we never regain a recollection of them. Yet they may send up ghostlike emanations through dreams and emotional disturbances, until they gain admission in the end. And finally, there are those secrets that continually surprise and astound us, as they emerge from the darkness of the psyche like epiphanies of another, unsuspected world. These are the angels and numinosities of childhood, the intimations of immortality that Wordsworth wrote about.

“All of us are somehow divided by our secrets,” says Jung. And although he was

talking in that instance about how secrets divide us from one another, I think his statement has another interrelated meaning. We are divided internally by our secrets. The structure of the psyche implies a morphology based on secrets. In fact, the secret can be seen as the basic unit of the psyche, as the cell is that of the body. 'Secret', from the Latin, se-cerno, means to separate or put apart. The word 'cerno' has to do with the act of sifting, discriminating, distinguishing or discerning. A 'secretum' is something set apart or isolated, and has the quality of solitude and privacy.

The body comes into being through the process of fission, in which the cells divide continually until the whole body is built up with all its organs. The psyche seems to come about in a similar fashion, with consciousness separating off from the unconscious through a process of fission, and subsequent differentiation in both systems taking place in like manner. At one stage Jung considered calling his psychology 'Complex Psychology', thereby emphasising this fissile aspect of the psyche. His early work in the use of the Word Association Test was revolutionary in demonstrating the existence of complexes in the psyche, of whose existence the subject was totally unaware. He writes:

At the simplest words hesitations and other disturbances occur which can only be explained by the fact that the stimulus-word has hit a complex. But why cannot an idea which is closely associated with a complex be reproduced smoothly? The prime reason for the obstruction is emotional inhibition. Complexes are mostly in a state of repression because they are concerned as a rule with the most intimate secrets which are anxiously guarded and which the subject either will not or cannot divulge. CW Vol. 3 #93

Every complex is a secret, and hides secrets. What it hides within itself is the knowledge that should be in consciousness.

When a client comes to analysis for the first time, the two overlapping realities, which the possessor of a secret is living in, whether aware of it or not, become particularly activated, and usually manifest in initial dreams. Quite often, the pervading atmosphere of these dreams is that of guilt. Here are two such dreams:

The first is that of Rainer, a young man of 27:

I've got an office in my father's factory. Some man tells me that the police will come and search it. I am not worried because I have nothing to hide. Nonetheless I look to see what I've got in my desk. I find a gun (a revolver) and remember that I killed a man. I am shocked and look around and notice that some young fellow observes me through the glass walls of the office, while I try to hide the gun. I get angry at him but can't get rid of him. He follows me as I leave the factory.

Jung says, in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*:

In many cases in psychiatry, the patient who comes to us has a story that is not told, and which as a rule no one knows of. To my mind, therapy only really begins after the investigation of that wholly personal story. It is the patient's secret, the rock

against which he is shattered. If I know his secret story, I have a key to the treatment. The doctor's task is to find out how to gain that knowledge.

MDR p.138

The symptom, the dream and the neurosis itself, are the containers, the complex structure that holds the analysand's secrets.

In this first dream, the young man has an office in his father's factory. This was a revelation to him, as he had assiduously avoided having anything to do with the family business. Here he is, 'about his father's business'. Like his father, he thinks he has nothing to hide, when the dream pointedly uncovers for him a gun and the realisation that he has committed murder- he has a guilty secret after all. It took some time in analysis before Rainer discovered that he had a great deal of anger and destructiveness, a great deal of hostility and competitiveness towards his father, and quite an amount of natural masculinity which lay concealed beneath his passive, bland exterior. This external aspect of the personality, the mask that we show to the world, Jung called the *persona*. It is the veil or cloak, the membrane that hides our inner selves from the world. Because of the persona, our secrets are maintained in security.

However, lurking behind the persona is that Other, the one who knows our secrets, just as in Rainer's dream, when he is observed by the "young fellow" behind the glass walls. He is the Shadow, the carrier of our guilt, "the thing a person has no wish to be," as Jung calls it. Rainer can't get rid of him. Our shadow dogs our heels until we turn at last and acknowledge it as our own. "This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine," as Prospero again says, reconciling himself to the ugly Caliban. Rainer's task was to turn and face his shadow, and discover that he was other, and more, than he imagined himself to be. It is a typical young man's dream.

The second dream is that of Roger, a man of 54:

I drive to the home of Maria Antonia and Eugenio to give them an English lesson. I am very upset and I arrive there before they come home. When they come in, I'm apologetic and I hit them and bruise them (and their children). The police arrive and M.A. and E. help to protect me and hide my crime from the police. M.A. and E. move some pictures. They are completely forgiving; only concerned that the police won't discover me.

In this second dream, there is something more complicated happening. The guilty secret that Roger needed to hide was one of ambivalence. He is both apologetic and aggressive towards his benefactors, who are also his pupils. Roger was a minor novelist who was suffering from writer's block, and was reduced to giving English lessons. He had grandiose fantasies of himself as a great writer, and was envious of both the settled home life of his pupils and their professional success. This generated a great deal of unconscious hostility, as he was economically dependent on them. Despite his attack, they protect him and conceal his 'crime' from the police. He himself becomes the secret.

However, we have to delve further into the secret life of this man's psyche in order to discover the real source of the great energy of aggression and guilt apparent in the dream. The couple on whom one is dependent, and yet who protect us even when angry and destructive towards them, is initially the parents. Behind the image of the couple in the dream is the original parental couple, towards whom Roger still experienced a deep ambivalence, even though they were long dead. Ambivalence towards the parents, an emotion frequently felt in adolescence, is kept secret when we refuse to grow up. We need to be able to freely express our anger in order to separate from them and live our own lives. If we fail to do so, we never become truly independent, ready to face the reality of who we are, and give up the grandiosity of childhood for the maturity of adulthood. While Roger still held on to the image of the loving son of loving parents - a picture far from the truth - his creative energy would remain blocked. He needed the alchemical operation of *separatio*, which a too restrictive superego (based on his mother's animus) was preventing.

An interesting detail, following their protection of Roger from the police, is that Maria Antonia and Eugenio 'move some pictures'. This gave me some hope for a positive outcome from the analysis. I take this to mean that some agency in the unconscious itself is changing the picture in the psyche, particularly in regard to the parental complexes. We are here moving beyond the complex into another, more hidden layer of the psyche. Behind the complex, or rather, hidden within it, is the archetype, which provides the complex with its centre, its structure, and its dynamism. The positive aspect of the couple archetype is bringing about some change in the psyche. The energy of this archetypal force, if consciously realised, if the secret is truly uncovered, would generate sufficient energy for Roger to overcome his writer's block. The writer's block is like those images in Fairy Tales, where the hero, or more often the heroine, must be dumb in order to undo some spell. Secrets and loss of speech are closely connected. Release from a spell happens when the energy hidden in the complex, its secret source of life, is finally revealed.

Both of these men came into analysis unhappy and distressed. The real secret of their unhappiness was hidden from both, but their dreams give us an inkling. Although there is a superficial similarity in the display of guilt, and the references to the police, the secret complex at the heart of the neurosis is different for each.

The unhappiness and isolation both were experiencing in their lives was very apparent, burdening them with a secret guilt, and it was this sense of isolation that drove them into analysis. Jung writes:

Nothing makes people more lonely, and more cut off from the fellowship of others, than the possession of an anxiously hidden and jealously guarded personal secret. Very often it is "sinful" thoughts and deeds that keep them apart and estrange them from one another. Here confession sometimes has a truly redeeming effect. The tremendous feeling of relief which usually follows a confession can be ascribed to the readmission of the lost sheep into the human community. His moral isolation and seclusion, which were so difficult to bear, cease. Herein lies the chief psychological value of confession.

In a later place he says:

Anything concealed is a secret. The possession of secrets acts like a psychic poison that alienates their possessor from the community.

To cherish secrets and hold back emotions is a psychic misdemeanour for which nature finally visits us with sickness- that is, when we do these things in private. But when they are done in communion with others they satisfy nature and may even count as useful virtues. It is only restraint practised for oneself alone that is unwholesome. It is as if man had an inalienable right to behold all that is dark, imperfect, stupid, and guilty in his fellow men- for such, of course, are the things we keep secret in order to protect ourselves. CW Vol. 16 ##124, 132

One secret we carry into analysis, as these two men did, is that of the shadow, which pervades our psyches with the feeling of guilt. The shadow means that we have done the forbidden thing, have fallen from grace, and must be expelled from paradise. Shadow and secrecy are in many ways synonymous. Yet Jung goes on:

How can I be substantial without casting a shadow? I must have a dark side too if I am to be whole; and by becoming conscious of my shadow I remember once more that I am a human being like any other...[T]hrough confession I throw myself into the arms of humanity again, freed at last from the burden of moral exile..

CW Vol. 16 #134

Analysis very often is initially about overcoming the isolation of those who are carriers of guilty secrets. It is about confession, as Jung says. He cites several cases in MDR, the most pertinent here being that of the upperclass lady doctor, who had poisoned her best friend in order to marry her husband. 'She had thought,' says Jung, 'that if the murder was not discovered, it would not disturb her.' However, after her daughter withdrew from her life, her favourite horse threw her, and her dog became paralysed, she felt forced to come to Jung, for one consultation only. Jung goes on:

If someone has committed a crime and is caught, he suffers judicial punishment. If he has done it secretly, without moral consciousness of it, and remains undiscovered, the punishment can nevertheless be visited upon him...It comes out in the end. Sometimes it seems as if even the animals and plants 'know' it.

As a result of the murder, the woman was plunged into unbearable loneliness. She had even become alienated from animals. And in order to shake off this loneliness, she had me share her knowledge. She had to have someone who was not a murderer to share her secret. She wanted to find a person who could accept her confession without prejudice, for by so doing she would achieve once more

something resembling a relationship to humanity. MDR, pp. 144-5

The shadow, however, is not the only common secret we bring into analysis. To introduce another typical kind, I would like to offer the brief initial dream of

Michelle, a 25-year old woman client:

I was doing gymnastics in my room. I may have been dancing around to music. I looked down and saw that my legs were bleeding. I didn't feel shocked, although they were bleeding a lot. It was bright red blood.

The secret that this young woman was bringing, which she needed to have heard, was that of Trauma. Michelle was unaware of how deeply wounded she had been, and still was. The trauma she carried was connected to actual wounding as an active playful eight-year-old, when she crashed through a plate glass partition, and almost died from loss of blood. She still carried the scars of that accident. Trauma is a secret wound, shameful and guilt-ridden. As Jung says,

All personal secrets...have the effect of sin or guilt, whether or not they are, from the standpoint of popular morality, wrongful secrets. CW Vol. 16 #129

However, there was more guilt hidden in these wounds. Michelle's mother, as a result of the shock and worry after the accident, became addicted to the tranquillisers she was prescribed, and continually blamed Michelle for her increasing invalidity. This had reached a climax at Michelle's puberty, when the mother began to accuse her daughter of being a prostitute, and was convinced she would come home pregnant one day. We can see the suggestion in Michelle's dream of both childhood accident and menstrual blood. One could say that, in order to keep her mother's approval and love, and to assuage her own guilt at her mother's condition, she had to bleed, that is, to be in continual trauma. However, Michelle had a problem with bleeding, as she had rejected the role of woman, had been a tomboy when young, and was very upset to find herself changing into a woman at puberty. So her unconcern in her dream is a double one: she is unconscious of both her woundedness and her femininity. The secret was the Trauma carried in her feminine essence, which was a closed space for her, since neither her mother nor grandmother provided a genuine feminine role model for her.

There is another secret that comes into analysis, even more hidden than that of Trauma. That is the family secret, or ancestral ghost. It announces itself by uncanny disturbances, an occult atmosphere, a curious spell-binding effect, that penetrates the haunted client's psyche, and the analysis itself. It is hard to get a hold on the imagery and symptoms, since they resist interpretation, especially from a subjective point of view. A woman in the early days of analysis dreamed:

There is a ghost upstairs in the house. People don't take it seriously. He puts the man asleep from his bed into the bath. The man is not horrified, but calls his son to discuss the problem. Downstairs there is a young couple kissing and wanting to be left alone. I will have to ask the boy to let me out when I go. The people upstairs are concerned he should be let out at evening time.

This 35-year old mother's approach to life was dictated by an animus that stemmed not from her own, but the family's past. She had a stiff, unemotional manner, and held herself rigidly in the chair as she talked in a little-girl voice. It was as if an

impersonal force held her rigid. Her dream came after a session in which she said, in a rather calculating, business-like way, that she and her husband were planning to have another child. She had already 'decided' the sex and the month of birth of the child. She displayed very little maternal feeling, but had, rather, an efficient, perfectionist manner. Her alienation from true mothering arose from a deeply deprived childhood, in which the atmosphere was distorted by inadequate, immature, and disturbed parents. It was her animus that parented her, a cold, ghost-like spirit presence.

While the couple in the dream are engaged in love-making, they are unconscious of the reality of the spirit world upstairs. The ghost in the attic is a revenant from the ancestral realm, engaged in a sort of rebirth ritual. My feeling was that, if the animus alone is involved in the conception of a child, some ancestral ghost may be inadvertently admitted into its destiny. There was a considerable inheritance of mental disturbance and compulsive behaviour in the family. There was also a stifling military and post-colonial atmosphere. What little family money there was meant that her father, a weak but patriarchal figure, had never really worked, while her mother had never grown up. All these family problems, originating many generations ago, were part of her secret endowment. In the dream we see the father passing on the problem to the son, which can be seen to be this woman's animus, which had inherited the family ghost, and the problems it represented. He is the key to the whole issue, and the reference to his being let out in the evening seemed to indicate that it would take the greater part of this woman's life to resolve it.

What seemed to be indicated in this woman's case is that the current real-life issues, particularly those of relationships, could be tackled in analysis, but the deeper secrets should be left to later on. Sometimes secrets must not be opened up. Marie-Louise von Franz in her book, *Archetypal Patterns in Fairytales*, discusses the importance of distinguishing those things that must be kept secret from those that can be revealed. She says, with reference to analysis,

It is good to understand the neurotic mechanisms of the patient, to pull *them* into light of understanding so that one can kill them. But on the other hand, there are always many secrets one should not understand about one's analysands. One should not even try to understand. One should respect these aspects of their lives and leave them alone. P.154

I think something similar lies behind a dream I had while I was preparing this talk:

I am bringing back an old lamp to some ancient shrine where it originally came from. There seems to be some secrecy about this as I hide the lamp under my coat/jacket. It is an old oil lamp, Greek or Roman. The place I am heading for seems to be some central shrine, like Delphi, but there are suggestions of Ireland, like Newgrange perhaps. As I walk along I am also thinking of a special stone associated with the lamp or the place. It is a stone with a sea urchin or starfish shape on it. As I go I am trying to avoid some man, a professor or authority figure. I want to put the lamp back in its original place, but if he gets involved or sees, he will want to interfere, perhaps use it for study etc. Also, as if he knows better, as he is the Professor.

I associate the lamp with the talk itself, the secret of secrets, a light that came from a sacred source, or omphalos. However, modern mankind has lost the connection to the secret source of life. For the Celts, the sea-urchin was the symbol of the world egg, the life-force, and the primordial seed. That is the secret at the heart of all ancient mysteries and religious beliefs, the secret that must not be talked about, as in the Eleusinian Mysteries. Jung says:

The experience of the archetype is frequently guarded as the closest personal secret, because it is felt to strike into the very core of one's being.

CW Vol.7 #119

What the initiates experienced was the reality of the numinous archetype, which revealed to them the source of eternal life. This knowledge

[f]rom the point of view of the conscious mind is highly irrational; it constitutes a secret which must be anxiously guarded, since the justification for its existence could not possibly be explained to any so-called reasonable person. CW Vol.12 #118

The 'so-called reasonable person' in the dream is the Professor, who will only use the lamp for intellectual, rational ends, which is to destroy its implicit meaning, its existence as a symbol. One has to face this conflict every time we approach symbolic, archetypal material in writing or lecturing. We have to serve the soul by hiding the secret meaning, and yet the collective demands a rational, articulate talk- words rather than images are valued.

Analysis itself is a *secretum*, a place set apart, in which the secrets encoded in the analysand's personal images can be shared and valued. It becomes of necessity a place of secrets. This not only refers to the secrets that the analysand brings into analysis, but the process that begins to happen to and through them. Jung says:

...through the transference of his secret and all the unconscious fantasies underlying it, a moral bond is formed between the patient and his father confessor. We call this a "transference relationship". Anyone with psychoanalytic experience knows how much the personal significance of the analyst is enhanced when the patient is able to confess his secrets to him.

CW Vol.4 #432

That is, the entrusting of secrets is the primary act in analysis, from which follow the unconscious projections, and which is the foundation of the transference. How the figure of the analyst is perceived will have something to say about the place of the secrets themselves in the economy of the analysand's psyche.

But what if the analysand does not feel able to confess his or her secrets, even if they are pressing for revelation? One middle-aged woman had the following dream early in her analysis:

- A. I arrange three things on this shelf. I don't know what they are, but I put them in order. But one of the things I conceal behind the other two. I put them in order because I know that I have to prepare myself for something.
- B. Someone rings at my door, which leads directly into my room. Outside the door stands a huge figure, dressed in a long cloak with a hood. The figure stands with its back to me. At the moment it turns I see that it is death, with a death's head skull grinning at me. I scream out loud, but he says: You knew that I was coming, you put your things in order. (Or maybe he asked if I have put my things in order). Now I glance back at the three things and I hope that he doesn't realise that I have concealed something.
- C. I sit with my boyfriend on the floor in a room. In front of him stands a little box with nice things in it. Maybe jewellery, I don't know exactly. He says: For every something-or-other you may take one thing out of this box.

This was a woman who worked for a fashion magazine, and who lived her life totally from the persona. This consisted of a hard, business-like, fashion plate image, aimed towards attracting and flirting with men. She had been in five long-term relationships, two of them marriages, and was embarking on another relationship, with a very well-off man. For her, the surface looks and the gleam of money dazzled her, and were confused in her mind with true love, for which she yearned, but of which she was mortally afraid.

Her dream is facing her with a very stark truth. Her time of hiding is over. When Death himself comes there are no more secrets: he searches out our most intimate motives and secret values. Stripped of all veneer, his skull face requires us to examine ourselves, and see where we are deceiving the world. Putting our things in order is also finding a place for our shadows, and letting the world see us not as the persona image from a magazine, but as we really are. It was very hard for this woman to reveal her hidden need and vulnerability, and the childish greed which lay behind her relationship. This mercenary attitude is revealed in the third section of the dream, where she is engaged in some sort of trade-off with her boyfriend. The box 'with nice little things in it, maybe jewellery' is what really mattered, but it would be too shameful to reveal this, even in analysis. The myth that sustained her was that hers was an ideal, romantic love, a destined relationship, the love of her life. I imagined it would take something as radical as death or grave illness to bring this woman to an acceptance of her hidden side.

Sometimes at the beginning of analysis there are dreams of secretaries or similar figures, which seem to indicate that the transfer of secrets is taking place. The secretary is the keeper of the secrets, a vital figure in the psychic economy. Marie-Louise von Franz writes:

...if an analysis goes deep enough, there comes a point where analyst and analysand share the secret which both know could not be shared with anybody else and which therefore establishes a unique relationship... This condition of "togetherness," which comes from participating in the same experience, cannot be explained- not because one *wants* to make a secret of it, but because it is inexplicable and irrational and very complex. So you can say that in every process of analysis there is a secret, and generally one cannot talk about it.

M.-L. von Franz, *Alchemy*, p.68

One of my initial dreams in analysis was about returning to the classroom where I taught, at the beginning of the school year, and realising all would be chaos because I had not done any prior preparation. However, help was at hand, in the form of the reliable, maternal school secretary, from whose great store I quickly extracted the materials I needed to deal with the situation, including a herbal pill for anxiety and tension! The secretary here knew what I really needed, as the brand name for such tablets is 'Quiet Life'! The figure of the secretary here combined the current figure of the analyst, with its positive transference- that is, someone to whom I felt able to entrust my secrets- together with that of an old, trusted headmistress, and beyond them, the unconscious itself, the real Keeper of the Secrets.

Part 2: *The Keeper of Secrets*

The keeper of secrets, for the Greeks and Romans, and for the alchemists, was Hermes/Mercurius. He was named as the steward, attendant and minister of the Gods. In the alchemical tradition, Jung says:

[Michael Maier] ...was referring to Hermes the mystagogue when he made the Erythraean Sibyl say of Mercurius: "He will make you a witness of the mysteries of God and the secrets of nature." Again, as the *divinus ternarius*, Mercurius is the revealer of divine secrets...CW vol.13 #278

Mercurius represents that figure in the unconscious, that, in the service of the wholeness and cohesiveness of the psyche, sequesters our secrets for us, that is, our wounds and traumas, and our unbearable pain, and the mysteries of childhood which are beyond our means of understanding. He also holds in safe-keeping for us those numinous experiences and strange dreams until the time we can make meaning of them. He is the initiator of secrets, he is himself the secret, and he is the key to the secret. How the latter is revealed to us in our lives becomes our individual destiny. It may be that we have to suffer trauma or abuse, accident or natural or human catastrophe. It may be that we have unusual dreams or childhood experiences that mark us out as followers of the secret way of Mercurius.

It was Mercurius himself who lay behind the childhood experiences of Jung, and who led to the foundation of Analytical Psychology. Jung says, in reflecting on his 'Big' dream of the underground enthroned phallus: "Through this childhood dream I was initiated into the secrets of the earth." The spirit in the earth, often represented as a phallus, was Hermes/Mercurius. This spirit hovered over all of Jung's childhood, which is imbued with the atmosphere of secrecy and mystery. Reading the first two chapters of *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, we come upon frequent references to secrets, and their crucial importance in the development of Jung's life.

The importance Jung came to attach to the whole subject of secrets is summed up in the very last chapter of *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. Here he writes:

It is important to have a secret, a premonition of things unknown. It fills life with

something impersonal, a *numinosum*. A man who has never experienced that has missed something important. He must sense that he lives in a world which in some respects is mysterious; that things happen and can be experienced which remain inexplicable; that not everything which happens can be anticipated. The unexpected and the incredible belong to this world. Only then is life whole. MDR, p. 391

The secret, then, has to do with the irrational dimension of existence, essentially something numinous. And it holds before us the ever-present reminder that consciousness, with its bias towards rationality, is incomplete without the essential experience of the numinous, which is the root of the secret's meaning. It is the intention of secrets, even though what we experience in keeping them is shame and pain, to introduce us to a new vision of wholeness. That vision begins as the narrow, confining space of the private secret, but if we hold it until understanding comes, it opens up to the eternal vistas of the collective unconscious.

Jung had several secrets in his childhood, of which the dream of the phallus was the first and most impressive. This was 'unexpected and incredible,' as it was given by the unconscious. The second great secret was something he felt impelled to carry out in his tenth year, a secret ritual action of great significance. This was the carving of the little manikin, placing it in a pencil case with a lock, and hiding it in the attic. Also in the case he placed a special painted stone, the manikin's special stone, which later he came to recognise as a version of a soul-stone. 'All this was a great secret,' says Jung. 'Secretly I took the case to the forbidden attic...and hid it with great satisfaction on one of the beams under the roof- for no one must ever see it!...No one could discover my secret and destroy it. I felt safe, and the tormenting sense of being at odds with myself was gone.' He goes on:

From time to time...I secretly stole up to the attic when I could be certain that no one would see me. Then I clambered up on the beam, opened the case, and looked at my manikin and his stone. Each time I did this I placed in the case a little scroll of paper on which I had previously written something during school hours in a secret language of my own invention...It was an inviolable secret which must never be betrayed, for the safety of my life depended on it...The possession of a secret had a very powerful influence on my character; I consider it the essential factor of my boyhood...The little figure with the stone was a first attempt, still unconscious and childish, to give shape to the secret.

MDR pp. 36-37

'If things became too bad,' says Jung, 'I would think of my secret treasure in the attic, and that helped me regain my poise.'

From this little ritual, we can see that the secret holds our souls in safe-keeping. To prevent us being at odds with ourselves and falling into disunity, our soul contained in the secret represents the unity and indivisibility of the psyche. Jung would later write of the stone which was sought by the alchemists, and which he saw as the representation of the Self, the centre and unity of the psyche. The person under the pressure of some intolerable secret is in danger of lapsing into fragmentation, which

is the unconscious state. If he can find a shape for the secret, he resolves the tension stemming from the unconscious, and restores a harmony and unity to consciousness. Thus was prefigured Jung's whole theory of Active Imagination, and the Transcendent Function.

Later, other experiences became components of the boy Jung's secret. There was the shameful secret of his neurosis, as Jung calls it, when he avoided school for many months, after being knocked down by another boy and hitting his head. Then there was the 'dark and terrible secret,' as he calls it, when in fantasy he sees God letting a huge turd fall on the Cathedral, an experience which revealed that God could be something terrible.

All of these experiences brought a sense of isolation to the boy Jung. He writes:

It would never have occurred to me to speak of my experiences openly, nor of my dream of the phallus in the underground temple, nor of my carved manikin...A strict taboo hung over all these matters, inherited from my childhood. I could never have talked about them with friends...My entire youth can be understood in terms of this secret. It induced in me an almost unbearable loneliness. My one great achievement during those years was that I resisted the temptation to talk about it with anyone... Later my mother told me that in those days I was often depressed. It was not really that; rather, I was brooding on the secret.

MDR, pp. 58-59

It is an interesting connection: our depressions are really the brooding of our psyches on our secrets. The libido sinks away from our conscious concerns, and a listlessness ensues. The energy has gone away somewhere, to where our secret lies, and our soul. 'For wherever your treasure is, that is where your heart will be too,' as the Bible says.

Jung kept silent about his childhood secrets, until he was in his sixties. It was this long brooding on his secrets which opened up to him the riches of the psyche. He says:

The pattern of my relationship to the world was already prefigured: today as then I am a solitary, because I know things and must hint at things which other people do not know, and usually do not want to know. MDR, p. 58

The price of this knowledge, which the world is still drawing on, was Jung's isolation and loneliness.

The *numinosum*, which is the archetypal core of all our secrets, is the well-spring of the inexhaustible riches of the collective unconscious. Finally, the secret is transformed from being the container of our shadow, our wounding, and our shame, into a treasure-chest full of the secrets of the earth. It thus becomes 'the secret hidden in the principle of individuation,' (CW Vol.13 #247) the same secret that was sought by the alchemists, the stone, the elixir and the gold, the hidden treasure hard to attain.

Part 3: *The Golden Key Fairytale*

We now come to our fairytale, *The Golden Key*

In the winter time, when deep snow lay on the ground, a poor boy was forced to go out on a sledge to fetch wood. When he had gathered it together, and packed it, he wished, as he was so frozen with cold, not to go home at once, but to light a fire and warm himself a little. So he scraped away the snow, and as he was thus clearing the ground, he found a golden key. Hereupon he thought that where the key was, the lock must be also, and dug in the ground and found an iron chest. "If the key does but fit!" thought he; "no doubt there are precious things in that little box." He searched, but no keyhole was there. At last he discovered one, but so small that it was hardly visible. He tried it, and the key fitted it exactly. Then he turned it once round, and now we must wait until he has quite unlocked it and opened the lid, and then we shall learn what wonderful things were lying in that box.

The title reminds us of the key to the secret, and the many secret places that keys open up in fairytales. Most famous are those bunches of keys given to heroes or heroines, one of which it is forbidden to use. In 'Faithful John,' the forbidden room holds the portrait of the princess of the Golden Dwelling, so powerful that if the prince sees it, 'he will fall violently in love with her, and will drop down in a swoon, and go through great danger for her sake,' and his dying father wants to protect him from this. In 'Our Lady's Child,' the poor woodcutter's daughter enters the room forbidden by the Virgin Mary, and sees the Trinity surrounded by wonderful golden light. The forbidden key in 'Fitcher's Bird' is perhaps best-known and most terrible, giving access to the blood drenched room full of dismembered corpses. Of course, the key is offered, as well as being forbidden, an offer we can't refuse. Those places kept secret by parental or collective amnesia and repression must in the end, for the wholeness of the psyche, be opened up to the light. The one who uses the key takes up a destiny ordained by the hidden secret. That secret may have to do with the unsuspected power of the Anima, the murderous aspect of the negative Animus, or the overwhelming experience of the numinous. The power emanating from these secret places is excitingly tempting, as are any tabooed places, and the person using the forbidden key opens up an unconscious power which he or she has either to come to terms with, or be overcome by.

Other keys we may be reminded of are those hidden under the Queen's pillow, which, like mother's handbag, ought to be the place most inviolable and secure. It is a most secret place. In 'Iron Hans,' the key to the cage of the wild, hairy man, brown like rusty iron, had to be stolen by the timid prince from beneath his mother's pillow. The king in 'The Twelve Brothers' hides the twelve prepared coffins, and his murderous intentions towards his sons, and lodges the key to the room under his wife's pillow. These secret places are the places of the unexpressed wishes and taboo areas of the parental psyches, those things that are kept from the children, for their own good. However, most of these are based on collective norms, and often outdated attitudes, in need of renewal. That renewal must come from one who has the courage to enter those forbidden areas and come to his or her own moral judgements, based on personal experience. This means, however, that he or she may thereby become an outcast, carrying the shadow of the collective.

Keys have to do with authority and power, particularly the power of binding and loosing. To have a key is to have access to areas of secret knowledge, and the image

of the key has stood for initiation and access to power. We still have the 'key of the door' as the image for the 21st birthday and the achievement of maturity and independence. The one who has a key is free to come and go, and is not bound, and so, is autonomous. In fairy tales there are often three keys, of silver, gold and diamond. The silver stands for purification, the gold for power over nature, and the diamond for supreme power and authority. The title of our tale, therefore, already suggests the theme of initiation into a secret knowledge of life, based on the wisdom of nature.

The key is an indication that our secrets are in safe keeping, and therefore also our souls. Dreams of keys, especially of not being able to find them, or of losing them, are very frequent in analysis. At such times we have to ask about the issues of security. Is there a fear of opening up, or of exposing one's secret? Is there a locked room in the psyche, which needs to be explored? Or is the analysand experiencing the need to retreat to a safe place, a private *temenos*, free from profane interference?

The single dream that a middle-aged woman brought to a short-term consultation consisted of one image only: two bunches of keys. She had no associations to offer, so I asked her if she carried a bunch with her. She took out a small bunch and identified them: three door keys, including one for a burglar alarm, one for the gym where she kept her mountain bike, and one which she could not identify for some time, and which left her disquieted and puzzled. Later in the session she remembered it was the key to 'a safe place,' a church hall which she went to for quiet and recollection, and safety from the suicidal thoughts she had been having. Issues of power and control were dominant, and could be seen to refer to the development of a strong, coping animus. However, underneath, there was the image of a small girl, lonely and isolated, who badly needed to be contained in a place of safety for her own protection. That there were issues of ambivalence towards this containment was indicated by the key to the mountain bike, as she also valued her independence. It was the conflict between independence and security that left her feeling very lonely and ultimately suicidal. Her employment as a social worker was mainly with children involved in abuse or custody cases, and she often had to remove them to places of safety. She was herself caught in a situation of conflict, but whether analysis could function as her place of safety was doubtful. She would in effect have to hand over the power, the bunch of keys, to the analyst, as the fairy tale characters do, in order to bring about a change. She needed to have control over her place of safety, and feared entrusting herself to the unknown.

What about the place of the story? We are not told specifically, but the place of gathering firewood is usually the wood or the forest. Jung writes:

The forest, dark and impenetrable to the eye, like deep water and the sea, is the container of the unknown and the mysterious. It is an appropriate synonym for the unconscious. CW Vol.13 # 241

The mystery, as von Franz points out (*Archetypal Patterns in Fairy Tales*, p.63) has to do with the fact that the forest, consisting of living plants rooted in inorganic matter,

represents the secret of the unconscious, which is rooted in the physiological processes of the body- 'matter itself so to speak.' (ibid. p.64) The instincts in their pure natural state, rooted in the wholeness of the body, represent the highest, spiritual stirrings. The real secret is that matter and spirit are one.

We hardly need to be reminded of the many forests that appear in fairytales: they are the most common of the secret places. The forest is the place of danger and abandonment, but it is also the refuge of those in flight for their lives. It is the place of trial and initiation, and the place of magic and enchantment. It represents that liminal state of transformation, where all social adaptation and persona attitudes are ineffective. The renewal of the psyche cannot take place without an immersion in the pure state of nature, which is the domain of the archetypes. In the secrecy of the forest, where there are no recognised paths, a new attitude awaits discovery. Culture and society are renewed through this contact with the *spiritus vegetativus*, as Mercurius was known. The image of the wood or the forest appears very often at the beginning of analysis, which is auspicious, indicating that the psyche is constellating the secret space of initiation, where the natural, organic processes can take over.

The time of the story is also relevant to our theme. Winter is the dark, secret time of the year, with nature herself withdrawn. This secret aspect is emphasized by the deep snow, what Eliot calls 'forgetful snow.' The earth is hidden, all things wait to be discovered. The seeds of life and the vegetable sap are stored away in nature's treasure house underground. Meanwhile, life is impoverished, literally and metaphorically. The question that arises each winter is that of hope- can there ever be a renewal, of light and life, from the darkness of winter? The analogous psychological question is: can there ever be a renewal or rebirth from our pain and suffering, which isolates us from humanity?

The hero of our story is such an isolated outcast. His isolation consists in the fact of his poverty, and in his being oppressed. Poverty is a secret state, imbued with shame. It is usually concealed, and as Jung says, 'anything concealed is a secret.' The person in poverty is a person set apart, which we saw as the basic meaning of the word, 'secret.' We think of the disempowering aspect of poverty, which forces people into menial work and forced labour. There is much secret shame about this, as there is always when we lose autonomy and dignity. Poverty can create the sense of helplessness in the ego, depriving it of a healthy sense of its autonomy. It also sows the seeds of an envious need, in which all good things are projected into an outside, unattainable reality, and inner resources are insufficiently felt, or felt to be insufficient.

Being forced to go out into deep snow to gather firewood clearly indicates that Eros is missing in the home, and the boy is being treated like a Cinderella. Being out in deep snow emphasises his isolation, as does the menial task he is forced to do. However, as with the sorting of beans from the ashes which Cinderella has to do, the task of gathering firewood has a relevance to his situation. When we are oppressed in our suffering, we are 'divided by our secrets,' as Jung says. The effect is psychic division and scattering. To counter this effect, we have to engage in a sometimes lengthy task of collecting and gathering. What we have to practise are the processes of *discrimination* and *discernment*. These two words, as well as the word *concern*, have

the same root as *secret*. What overcomes the negative effect of secrets is the positive effect of concern, the steady discrimination we have to apply to perhaps the most trivial tasks. Collecting firewood entails constant acts of discrimination, through which the conscious ego is rooted and strengthened. The lengthy process of analysis, sometimes thought to be full of profound insights and wise revelations, is rather more like the mundane act of collecting firewood. The constant subjecting of the seemingly trivial events of life to a caring scrutiny, rejecting this, accepting that, building up the pack of raw material, seems more apt an image.

The first, necessary stage of the boy's initiation is complete when he has packed his sledge with the firewood. However, the purely personal, instinctual urges now take over. 'He wished to light a fire and warm himself a little.' This stirring of basic instinct, the first indications of an individual destiny, is the real key to what happens next. It is the unconscious taking the initiative, and promoting a differentiation from the collective demands that he is so far caught in. This is a necessary compensation for the boy's conscious situation. As Jung says:

Isolation by a secret results as a rule in an animation of the psychic atmosphere as compensation for loss of contact with other people. It causes an activation of the unconscious... CW Vol.12 # 57

The first stirring of the unconscious is felt at the purely physiological level. It inevitably leads to an act of autonomy: to light a fire for himself means that the boy is creating his own centre or focus (which means hearth). The possibility of independence from the cold, uncaring world of home is glimpsed. Clearing the snow to create the hearth is the primal act of creating a *temenos*, or sacred space: it is a kind of primitive mandala.

The drawing of a spellbinding circle...is an ancient magical device used by everyone who has a special or secret purpose in mind. He therefore protects himself from the "perils of the soul" that threatens him from without and that attack anyone who is isolated by a secret. CW Vol. 12 # 63

The scraping away of the snow is the first act of uncovering and reclaiming. Although it is initiated by the basic human need, it is serving the greater aims of the unconscious. It is an act of making conscious, or of recovering something from forgetfulness or repression. It is what the sun in spring will do, and so it signifies the natural renewal of life. The first stage of analysis can be seen in such an image, we have to do a great deal of scraping away before we have a solid base for the renewal of life.

The unexpected finding of a key suggests that Mercurius is at work here. A lucky find was said to be a *Hermaion*, a gift of Hermes. It is appropriate that the god who was called the lover of children should intervene in this boy's destiny. As the spirit of nature, he uncovers the secret of the gold from the cold, dark earth. This is precisely the process the alchemists worked for, the discovery of the gold in the inert matter contained in their retorts. It signifies the intuitive awareness of the wisdom of the unconscious, which is revealed in its own time, not according to the time of rational

consciousness. It seems to be an image of how things happen in the psyche, as Jung discusses in 'The Secret of the Golden Flower.'

...the light circulates according to its own law if one does not give up one's ordinary occupation. The art of letting things happen, action through non-action...became for me the key that opens the door to the way. We must be able to let things happen in the psyche. CW Vol. 13 #20

With the discovery of the key, a natural process of evolution takes over. The natural fire is forgotten, as the creative fire of discovery takes its place. The search now is for the secret to which the key inevitably points. What is underlined here too is the overcoming of division. Key and lock belong together: what has been sundered must be rejoined. It is a question of uncovering what the snow has hidden, and the cold lack of Eros also. The search for the lock is the second phase of initiation. It is the knowledge at the heart of individuation. Each key is individually fashioned, and fits only one lock. In a similar manner the ego and the unconscious combine in the psyche. The phallic message too cannot be ignored, especially as the story concerns a young boy on the threshold of manhood it would seem. The fit between man and woman is a fact of nature too, and equally a symbol of the fruitful combination of ego and unconscious.

To find the lock, the boy has to dig in the ground, a harder task than scraping away the snow. To dig in the frozen soil is indeed an *opus contra naturam*, working against the natural state of the earth itself. It would require dedication and commitment, a long and laborious work. It is a sort of initiatory task, a test of the strength and cohesiveness of the ego. The fact that it is an iron chest which he finds confirms this interpretation. Iron is hard and durable, and was regarded as a base metal which came from the Underworld. It was a metal ruled by Mars in antiquity, which indicated its warlike, aggressive nature. We are strongly reminded here of Iron John, forest dweller, locked in his cage, the golden ball which led to his freedom, and his golden well in the forest. There is a hidden affinity between the two metals, the gold which is of heaven, and the iron of earth. Jung points out that

Mars characterises the instinctual and affective nature of man. The subjugation and transformation of this nature seems to be the theme of the alchemical opus.

CW Vol.13 #176n

To unlock the secrets hidden in the heart of nature (the iron), we need a spiritual, creative consciousness (the golden key), a light which is from beyond nature. Here we see a true union of the rational and the non-rational. This is the secret of the mysteries, the secret of the alchemists, and it is also Jung's.

The chest is another of those secret places often met with in fairy tales. It can contain a treasure, or it may confine someone- a baby perhaps, that a wicked king wants to kill. As Neumann points out, the chest is one of the images of the elementary character of the archetypal Feminine. It emphasises her containing and protecting aspect. She is the source of life and fertility, she is the container of the seeds of new

life, and she is the protectress of the young. This aspect pertains to the vegetative level of the Great Mother. Nature is the keeper of the secret, and she herself offers us the key, if we follow her aright.

However, Nature does not give up her secrets easily, and that is indicated by the search for the keyhole. 'No keyhole was there.' Was it the boy's persistence that indeed eventually created a keyhole? Or is it that the way to the unconscious is almost undetectable? How often are the slightest dreams, the merest hint of a fantasy, dismissed as irrelevant, trivial? It is as if the functions of consciousness are crude and unwieldy, and need to be refined in order to operate in the dimension of the unconscious. We need the sensibility of a finely tuned intuition to gain the secret entry.

We have to search and search in order to find that tiny keyhole. It is a test of our trust in the unconscious. To those who have the right attitude, Nature finally gives up her secret, which is a paradox. Our story reveals that, even at the lowest ebb, in the cold, dark time of the year, the seeds of dormant life are safely contained and preserved. We learn that life can never be extinguished completely. What applies to nature applies to man too: there is in him a seed of immortal life which death shall not extinguish.

And what about the final sentence of our story, which declares there is a wonderful treasure, but doesn't tell what it is? It reminds us again that not all secrets must be revealed. In fact, ultimately, says Jung in order to promote our true individuality, and to prevent us falling back into an identification with the collective, we must have a real secret which we cannot reveal:

...the individual on his lonely path needs a secret which for various reasons he may not or cannot reveal. Such a secret reinforces him in the isolation of his individual aims. A great many individuals cannot beat this isolation... Only a secret which the individual cannot betray- one which he fears to give away, or which he cannot formulate in words, and which therefore seems to belong to the category of crazy ideas- can prevent the otherwise inevitable retrogression. MDR, p.376

I think there is something here too about the mysterious way the Self works. It is the rejected and abandoned one who finds the lost, forgotten treasure. But it is not primarily through setting out to discover the secret knowledge that we attain it. The lesson of the tale is that we may have to patiently and humbly suffer the conditions of our life, and follow merely the faintest stirrings of our beings, and then the Self responds, beyond our expectation.

We are also reminded here of the final revelation in the mysteries of Eleusis, when out of the dark of night and death, the glorious shining vision was revealed, which signalled the experience of immortality. The initiate at this point was called *epoptes*, which means one who has seen. Nothing further was required than the vision. The seer is transformed, so completely that not one participant in those mysteries over hundreds of years has given away their secret. At this point in our story the secret is transformed into mystery, the vision of the numinous. What is in the chest is truly

ineffable. Our personal experience of the Self likewise cannot and must not be given away. The last image our fairy tale suggests is that of the initiate, finger at his lips, who urges us, in the presence of the psyche's deepest secrets, to respectful silence.

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