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Day Residue in Dream and Myth¹

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Students of mythology have by now accepted the thesis that human emotion is a dynamic factor in the creation of myth. As the philosopher Cassirer (2) puts it, in a myth "all objects are benignant or malignant, friendly or inimical, familiar or uncanny, alluring and fascinating or repelling and threatening. ... The real substratum of myth is not a substratum of thought but of feeling."

Curiously enough, this same author (2) is of the opinion that Freud's contribution to myth formation is "entirely limited to variations and disguises of one and the same psychological theme—sexuality." This, of course, we cannot accept in view of Freud's profound interest in myth, his repeated discussion of it, and his clear-cut statements with respect to its meaning. He believed that much of mythological thinking is a projection of the psyche onto the outside world (3). He even indicated a possible approach to the myth-maker's mind.² In his *New Introductory Lectures* (4) he wrote: "In the manifest content of dreams there frequently occur

¹ Presented at the Midwinter Meetings of the American Psychoanalytic Association, New York, December, 1953.

² I think we could well assume that in the psyche of the anonymous myth-maker the same mechanisms function as in the artist. In his *Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art*, Ernst Kris (5) points out that "During psychoanalytic treatment, it seems comparatively easy to establish connections between preconscious elements in the artist's work and those of which he had always been aware. The contribution desired from the storehouse of memories and the sometimes very numerous clues borrowed from one or the other source in the environment and condensed into a single trait appear in analytic material sometimes without particular effort. But only extended analysis leads to repressed psychic material, to motivation from the id—and only this allows full demonstration of the interaction and interconnection of elements derived from the various stages of awareness."

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images and situations which remind of known motifs in fairy tales, sagas, and myths. The interpretation of such dreams, then, throws a light upon the original interests which have created these motifs."

I myself had the opportunity of observing such imagery in the dream of one of my patients. He was a businessman who owned a house at the edge of a suburban community near a wooded area. The dream was reported in a period of particular emotional stress. He was mourning for his father-in-law. Furthermore, as they had been business partners, there was considerable financial upheaval. The dream was as follows:

I am at home with my family, yet at the same time it is a mountain inn. We are looking out of the window and see a figure arriving, hiding in or going into a stone entrance. Is it a woman in a red coat? Then it is an older man with a child, then it is a group of dwarfs. The innkeepers indicate that one has to watch out for them. They are liable to steal, eat one out of house and home. ... We are about to go away from the house when the thought of the dwarfs who might eat everything up holds me back. We are sitting now around the table with the thought that we have prevented it. But among us there is a man with a harelip—one of them.

The dream occurred during an afternoon nap, at the end of a hectic week full of business troubles. Beyond that, the house had been in urgent need of repair work, for which the patient had contracted the week before. On awakening, he heard the gnawing and skittering of squirrels in the attic. On falling asleep he had heard them too, and had thought then, "They are going to eat their way to the pantry." Fully awake, he had listened for the noise of the children at play.

His first association, thus, is to the squirrels. To the red coat of the old woman or man, Santa Claus comes to his mind. The mountain inn reminds him of a horrible night he had spent years ago in a dilapidated inn where rats had scurried through his room all night. The harelip is a reminder of his late, favorite older brother, who had this defect. Hares are rodents too, he thinks. The older man, furthermore, is the children's beloved grandfather

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who just died. His own late father comes to his mind, and then his grandfather, who, he was told as a child, would watch out for him in heaven. Finally he thinks of his grandmother, who died when he was five years old. She had come with an aunt and a cousin from Europe and had moved in with them into their already overcrowded home on the lower East Side. It was hard to feed three more mouths at the time. Hence the words, "They'll eat you out of house and home." Dwarfs immediately and very intensely are connected

with stories about dwarfs or brownies or elves, eagerly read in childhood. The week before he had spoken to the builder about the squirrels in the attic, at which time the builder had laughingly reassured him that in the course of his work they would be chased out. The builder had awakened him from his afternoon nap. The cost of the repairs, on top of his business worries, had oppressed him all week.

The outstanding figures in the manifest content of this dream are, no doubt, the dwarfs or their variations—the old woman or old man with the child. His associations to these figures and their activity and dress lead immediately into two main directions: the squirrels, rats, hare on the one hand, and the dead beloved relatives on the other. The intruder quality is common to both. The squirrels intrude from the day residue, that is, from preconscious thinking. From memory and unconscious thinking, the dead and living rivals are the intruders. The older, the contemporary, and the younger generations are all represented in the associative trend. The manifest dream shows a continuous struggle against the disturbers. It tries to change them as representatives of worries and concern into benevolent creatures. The squirrels become dwarfs, brownies, elves—the little men who in myth do your work while you sleep. The scurrying of the squirrels becomes the hammering and toiling of the elves.

I wish to draw attention to his attempt to master anxiety. Our dreamer's anxiety is primarily connected with the arousal of oral conflicts.³ The financial and personal loss was perceived by him

³ No doubt genital and anal rivalry with the deceased were also present, but the greatest stress at this time of mourning was felt on the oral plane. This may well be characteristic of mourning in general.

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in terms of threat to his food supplies—the dead relatives, he is warned, will eat him out of house and home. Furthermore, at the end of the dream one of them sits down at the dinner table. No doubt the association to the children is also significant; his worry about providing for them adds to his troubles. The hostility thus liberated toward the beloved objects in such oral terms motivates the dreamer's defense. He asserts affectionately their good and protective qualities. Yet the conflict remaining unsolved arouses anxiety which finally leads to awakening. The intruding figures of the dream are the awakeners in the sense in which Lewin (7) describes them. From the outside the noise of the squirrels and of the playing children tends toward the same effect. Against the disturbance from within and from without, the defense of denial and transformation into the opposite is used. The myth of the little men comes to the dreamer's service. He tries to sleep on with the comforting thought: "You can rest, you don't need to worry, the little people will protect you and work for you." The squirrels furnish the day residue in the dream in a most prominent manner, yet for the sake of dream formation, unconscious material had to join in to supply the necessary cathexis. This material is represented by the dreamer's dead relatives, rivals in many respects, yet also protectors.

I should like to suggest that a process similar to that which produced my patient's dream also took place in the minds of the creators of the myth of the little people. This worldwide myth, most richly developed in the folklore of the northern and middle European countries, is a myth of poor people—no princes or knights here. The day residue in the dream of our patient is furnished by intruding rodents. We postulate that daily experience with similar enemies operated as a factor in the formation of the myth. Doubtless rodents of one sort or another were a source of anxiety to the people. Doubtless the wooden huts of the poor were infested, and the meager stores of food endangered. The myth turns the hated and feared creatures into beneficent little beings—just as in our dream—although their mischievous character is never completely lost in the stories.

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Could the myth have been created out of this material alone? Hardly. For the process of myth formation itself is unconscious. In my patient's dream the unconscious source is furnished by his ambivalent relationship to his dead relatives. By linking generation to generation, he denies the phenomenon of death.⁴ The same unconscious source, ambivalent relationship to dead relatives, furnishes the power for the creation and persistence of the myth throughout the centuries. As Cassirer (2) says, "The conception that man is mortal by his nature and essence seems to be entirely alien to the mythical and primitive religious thought. ... In a certain sense, the whole of mythical thought may be interpreted as a constant and obstinate negation of the phenomenon of death. In Chinese religion, ancestor worship signifies that the ties with the dead are by no means broken and that the dead continue to exercise their authority and protection."

Anthropology tells us that dwarfs, gnomes and similar little people are chthonic—beings, that is, coming from the underworld. The ancestral quality of these little people is equally recognized by all authorities.⁵ But the younger generation also, no doubt, entered into the formation of the myth; for gnomes are *little* people. In hungry times the ambivalent feeling toward children must have evoked intense oral conflict, and the myth was an attempt to solve the conflict by turning the children into playful and helpful creatures.

In myths of the little people, the oral aspect is stressed over and over again.⁶ Most often elves, gnomes and the rest have to be

⁴ I should like to suggest that such representation of the generations in a dream has the function of denying death; in other words, of allaying the fear of dying.

⁵ The Russian *Domovoi*, perhaps, most clearly shows the connection. He is a house spirit, ancestor—usually the founder of the family—who watches over and protects the inhabitants, taking care that all is in order. He lies behind the stove and likes the fire. He is shaggy and has a long beard. His correct name is never used. He is called *He* or *Himself* or *Grandfather (Ded)*. Some of the supper is left out for the *domovoi*, who bustles about in the dark, always busy, guarding against the intrusion of strange, hostile spirits (6).

⁶ Phallic elements, however, are not entirely missing: the little man representing the phallus; his noise hinting at the primal scene. Anal material is present, too: the little people often are miners.

⁷ Dr. Charles Brenner called my attention to the following passage in Heine's "Harzreise, " I. Bergidylle III:

"Und das liebe Mädchen spricht:
 'Kleines Völkchen, Wichtelmännchen,
 Stehlen unser Brod und Speck,
 Abends liegt es noch im Kasten,
 Und des Morgens ist es weg.
 "Kleines Völkchen, unsre Sahne
 Nascht es von der Milch und lässt
 Unbedeckt die Schüssel stehen,
 Und die Katze säuft den Rest."

⁸ The Finnish spirit, *Para*, brings money, rye and other goods to his owner, but usually milk, cream and butter. In such cases he takes the shape of a cat, a fine example of denial and turning into its opposite (6).

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appeared with food. Oftentimes they steal it,⁷ occasionally they bring it.⁸

Etymological investigation gives us further evidence for our hypothesis regarding the formation of the myth of the little people. One German word for elf is *Kobold*, a species of mischievous and noisy house spirit. He is an ugly dwarf, red from the fire in the hearth.⁹ The word *Kobold* is related to the Anglo-Saxon *cofgodas*, meaning household god (1). Here we see the link to the unconscious source; for household gods have always been associated with ancestor worship.

Brownies in the Scotch saga are goblins who do the housework while the homeowners are asleep. They are usually dwarflike with short brown locks, a brown coat and a brown hood. They participate in a friendly manner in the fate of the houses in which they live (1). The Dark Elf of the Edda is described as a were brown man, a benevolent spirit or goblin of shaggy appearance, supposed to haunt old houses, especially farm houses in Scotland, and to perform useful household work while the family sleeps (8). The shagginess of the Dark Elf, like the short brown locks of the brownies, is clearly reminiscent of the furred rodents.

To sum up: Our hypothesis is that as the day residue participates in the formation of the dream, so do anxiety-arousing external phenomena enter into myth formation. In themselves these are not

⁹ In a personal communication, Dr. Ernst Kris suggested to me that *Kobold* is the representative of the flame itself.

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effective. They need unconscious cathexis for the production of myth. In the myths of the little people the fear of rodents menacing stores of food furnished the preconscious stimulus, while the unconscious material came from the ambivalent relationship toward ancestors and children. The conflict is primarily an oral one. The myth attempts to allay anxiety by denial and transformation, turning the malevolent into the beneficent.

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