

CHAPTER 3

DREAMS

[Freud] derives the unconscious from the conscious . . . I would put it the reverse way: I would say the thing that comes first is obviously the unconscious . . . in early childhood we are unconscious; the most important functions of an instinctive nature are unconscious, and consciousness is rather the product of the unconscious.

(Jung, *CW18:14f*).

DREAMS AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN CONSCIOUS AND UNCONSCIOUSNESS

We have already seen that Jung believed that everything that eventually emerges into consciousness originates in the unconscious; i.e., the unformed archetypes achieve form as we experience them in our outer lives and in our dreams. Thus it is not sufficient to look at the events of our lives causally; we also had to look at them from a teleological point-of-view. That is, not only are we pushed forward by our past actions, we are also pulled forward by the actions we need to take, many of which are contained within us as archetypes.

Because dreams are the most common and most normal expression of the unconscious psyche, they provide the bulk of the material for its investigation.

(Jung, *CW8: 544*).

In his practice as a psychoanalyst, dreams were readily available as the primary raw materials Jung used in his exploration of the unconscious. As we have already discussed in chapter one, it was Freud's insistence on the significance of dreams that first attracted Jung to psychoanalysis. It was Freud's insistence on limiting dreams to sexual rebuses that led Jung to eventually part company with Freud. In fact, it was Jung's discovery of mythological referents in dreams which led Jung to his concept of the

collective unconscious, and its building blocks: the archetypes. Jung was driven ineluctably to his model by the simple fact of his insistence on honoring the dream, and reporting what he found.

The idea that there was a collective underpinning to the psyche, which interacts with consciousness, and which we can observe in our dreams, isolated Jung from his peers. This was much like Jung's experience with his fellow students in college with respect to psychic phenomena. It is always easier to dismiss strange results than to look at such material in a totally fresh light.

Yet, in the previous two chapters, we have already seen that psychological reality is a good deal more complex than supposed common sense would imagine it to be. We have seen that animals (including human animals like you and me) are born with the ability to access behaviors and images that have evolved across the vast history of their species (and all the species that preceded them). And these aren't just piled up haphazardly in some dusty attic of "racial memory;" they are organized so carefully that they can be activated at pre-determined points in our development.

Jung called these inherited behaviors and images archetypes, and I have suggested an alternative term: cognitive invariants. He stressed that they are formless until they are activated in our lives (i.e. this is the imprinting process that Konrad Lorenz documented so carefully). Though we don't fully understand how this mechanism operates, it is clearly highly efficient, as it means that a given archetype (say the archetype of the mother) can operate over a wide variety of cultures in a wide variety of times and places. (Since the archetype seems essentially formless, one possibility is that an archetype is stored as some sort of numeric algorithm, but that is no more than speculation at this early point in understanding the nature of the mind.)

. . . It is only our conscious mind that does not know; the unconscious seems already informed, and to have submitted the case to a careful prognostic examination, more or less in the way consciousness would have done if it had known the relevant facts. But,

precisely because they were subliminal, they could be perceived by the unconscious and submitted to a sort of examination that anticipates their ultimate result.

(Jung, *CW18*: 545).

As we have already discussed, Jung pictures consciousness as a tiny area on the tip of the pyramid of the unconscious. Just past the boundary of consciousness lies the personal unconscious, filled with memories of images and behaviors we have acquired during our life-time. Past the domain of the personal unconscious we pass into the more accessible regions of the collective unconscious, such as tribal (or cultural) memories. Past that we can penetrate further into racial memories, and even memories of earlier species. Is this really possible? Or is this just mystical nonsense, as Jung's critics would have it? To answer those questions, we have to look into the current state of scientific knowledge about dreams.

DO OTHER SPECIES DREAM?

Dream research has indicated that dreaming is hardly confined to humans. Even an animal as primitive as an opossum, which has changed little in 65 million years, dreams. With the exception of the spiny anteater, a very primitive mammal, all mammals dream. Birds also dream, though they spend less time each day dreaming than mammals. Even reptiles sometimes exhibit symptoms of dreaming.

Of course, we can't ask a cat or a dog if they dream. But researchers have found that humans have episodes of REM sleep (i.e., rapid eye movement) at roughly 90 - 100 minute intervals during a normal night. In total, we spend about 1-1/2 to 2 hours a night in these REM periods. These cycles are not limited to sleep; we go through the same *ultradian* (i.e., more than once a day) cycles throughout the day, but we are less aware of them. When subjects are awakened during REM sleep, they normally report dreams. (They may also dream during non-REM sleep, but this dreaming seems more confused and fragmented.)

Other mammals experience similar periodic episodes of REM sleep. There seems to be little difference in the total amount of REM sleep, regardless of how developed or how primitive the mammal. It has been found, however, that carnivores do dream more than their prey. Poet Lisel Mueller perfectly captures this image in

"A Poem about the Hounds and the Hares"

After the kill, there is the feast.
And towards the end, when the dancing subsides
and the young have sneaked off somewhere,
the hounds, drunk on the blood of the hares,
begin to talk of how soft were their pelts, how graceful their leaps,
how lovely their scared, gentle eyes.

(Cole:1971).

In all species, the new-born dream much more than adults. E.g., a new-born human baby sleeps two-thirds of the time, and half of that sleep is REM sleep. This is a total of about 8 hours of dreaming a day, 4 - 5 times as much as an adult dreams.

But do animals really dream, in the same sense that we dream? All evidence seem to indicate that they do.

Animal lovers have observed their favorite creatures sniffing, whining, yelping, miaowing, wagging or flapping their tails, moving paws, sucking, licking chops, breathing heavily and evincing a gamut of emotion

(Luce, 1967: 196).

It is hard not to conclude that the animals are dreaming during such periods, especially as all the physiological measurements (Theta waves in an EEG, rapid oxygen metabolism, etc.) are consistent with similar measurements during human dreaming, once we adjust for differences between species. [See Hartmann:1988 and Luce & Segal:1966 for much of the material on the scientific study of dreams in the previous two sections.]

THE EFFECT OF SLEEP DEPRIVATION

In a recent episode of "Star Trek - the Next Generation" called "Night Terrors," the effects of sleep deprivation were frighteningly dramatized. The Starship Enterprise discovered another Federation starship with a lone survivor. All of the other crew members had committed either murder or suicide in particularly horrible ways. As the crew of the Enterprise investigated this tragedy, they themselves began behaving atypically: snapping at each other, drifting off into reveries, hearing or seeing things that weren't there. This was just the way the other Starship crew had behaved in the last days before their tragic end.

Gradually the crew of the Enterprise came to discover that no one was able to dream any more because something had upset their REM cycles. Thankfully, they found a way to restore their REM sleep. Once again, as in all good "Star Trek" adventures, disaster had been averted at the last moment. At the end of the episode, the crew were all lying down to sleep again, knowing this time they could dream.

Scientific study supports this fictional portrayal. In experiments where volunteers tried to stay awake as long as possible, they became disoriented in both time and space, hallucinated, lost motor abilities and eventually evidenced psychotic symptoms, including paranoia. And, at some point, it became impossible to keep subjects from dreaming; they would spontaneously fall into tiny, split-second periods of REM sleep without realizing they were doing so. When the experimental subjects finally get a chance to sleep, they fall immediately into an especially excited dream sleep, and stay there until they wake. Up to a certain point of sleep deprivation, the period of REM sleep roughly corresponds to the amount they missed during their sleepless period.

In attempts to find out what happens when dream deprivation is pushed still further, dream researchers have experimented with animals, often taking the period of sleeplessness far beyond the limits of human endurance. Like humans, animals kept from

dreaming long enough, become disoriented, lose motor abilities, and eventually exhibit symptoms which, for their particular species, could be considered psychotic.

WHY DO WE DREAM?

Let's summarize what we have discussed about dreams to this point. With one exception all mammals experience REM-sleep, hence dreams. Birds also dream, but less often than mammals, and reptiles sometimes appear to be dreaming, though this isn't common. Deprived of sleep, humans and other animals become disoriented and eventually psychotic.

Then remember Paul MacLean's triune brain model, discussed in chapter two. Maclean demonstrates that the human brain contains a sub-brain similar to that of the reptiles, a second sub-brain at the level of development of mammals, and a final sub-brain shared only with other primates. Further, the "reptile brain" appeared at a time when species had become complex enough to need to deal with "instinctual group behavior" such as "territoriality, ritual and the establishment of social hierarchies." The "mammal brain" appeared when there was a necessity for an internal mechanism to "govern social awareness and relationships." Finally, the "primate brain" appeared when higher brain functions were needed to deal with an increasingly visual orientation, and the beginnings of language.

From the above, it seems likely that dreams must have been one mechanism for dealing with increasingly more complex social behavior. One would imagine that the early proto-dreams of the reptiles, which appeared sometime between 150 and 250 million years ago, were probably cold-blooded and unemotional. The rich emotional landscape we associate with dreams must have been largely in place as mammals appeared ten to twenty million years ago; those mammalian dreams must have dealt increasingly with complex social and emotional issues. Finally, in primates, especially humans, dreams

should have become increasingly visual and have evidenced at least a primitive language . . . a symbolic language, perhaps?

If this scenario is accurate, we then have to ask what purpose dreams perform in helping individuals deal with complex social behavior? In his book *Consciousness Regained* (1984), Nicholas Humphrey, an experimental psychologist specializing in animal behavior, offers a start at an answer. He begins with a central feature of dreams which is far too often ignored: our dream experience is every bit as real to us as our daytime experience! Now it is true that dreams take place in a phantasmagorical landscape where daytime rules cease to apply . . . except one: with few exceptions, our dreams evoke the same feelings of happiness, sadness, fear, lust, hunger, thirst, exultation, awe, as similar experiences do in everyday life.

In other words, dreams center on emotional accuracy, not physical accuracy. It is only afterwards, in the cold light of day that we condemn dreams as nonsensical. While they are taking place, they can be all too real . . . as anyone would acknowledge who has ever woken up in a cold sweat from a nightmare. This feature of dreams accords well with the evolutionary development of dreams we have traced above; i.e., that the first creatures that were true dreamers were the mammals and the mammalian brain deals with emotional issues.

We learn largely from doing. Since we experience dreams as real, Humphrey points out that we should be able to learn from our dreams in much the same way that we learn from our daytime experience. He argues that dreaming provides an opportunity to try out behavior in advance, so that when necessity calls for new behavior, we will already have perfected that behavior. Since children have a greater need to learn future behaviors than adults, children should, therefore, dream more than adults. And, in fact, in all species, the new-born dream much more than adults; e.g., a new-born human baby experiences

REM dreaming about 8 hours of dreaming a day, 4 - 5 times as much as an adult dreams. It is almost as if the babies were dreaming themselves into existence.

Humphrey suggests four categories into which we might expect a child's dreams to fall:

1. Experiences which he does not know of already, and especially those which he as a particular individual might otherwise never get to know.
2. Experiences which he will not get to know of in reality until he has grown older.
3. Experiences which he observes other people to be going through and which are characteristic of the community.
4. Experiences which, whether he has had occasion to observe them or not, are characteristic of human beings in general.

(Humphrey, 1984: 89).

In his list above, Humphrey concentrates on those experiences which a child has not yet had in actuality. However, as a child grows into an adult, there should become a greater need to incorporate actual life experiences into the learning process of dreams.

Accordingly, I would suggest adding at least two additional categories to his list:

5. Experiences from our daytime life which went well.
6. Experiences from our daytime life which didn't go so well.

In the former case, our dreams can repeat and even improve upon our actual actions in order to use them again profitably in the future. In the latter case, dreams can try out alternative actions until something finally works successfully. All six of these types of dream experience would allow not only children, but all of us, to perfect and extend both the repertoire of instinctual behaviors available to us at birth, and those new behaviors we learn over the course of our life.

If Humphrey's theory is correct then dreams should leave actual traces in the structure of our brains, so that they can be called upon when necessary in our daily life, just as instincts are called upon. In *Dreams and the Growth of Personality*, psychologist

Ernest Lawrence Rossi summarizes research evidence supporting a similar view, especially that of Michel Jouvet:

In 1975, French neurophysiologist Michel Jouvet theorized that dreams (which he terms paradoxical sleep) release genetic programs . . . which serve to reorganize the brain. His extensive research with cats serves to bolster this theory.

(Rossi, 1985:203-206).

Animals less developed than reptiles proceed almost entirely from instinct. Pre-programmed behavior kicks in to fit almost any situation. But fixed behavior patterns don't deal very well with change; the individual animal needs more freedom of behavior. In that light, the increased complexity of the reptiles evolved to provide the individual reptile with a wider range of possible behaviors beyond those it had hard-wired at birth. Primitive dreaming would have then been tied hand-in-hand with a more complex consciousness, which allowed individual adaption to the environment.

In this viewpoint, dreams are a central part of a total system of consciousness, rather than some vestigial anomaly. A wide variety of future behaviors could be tried out during dreams. Dreams with unresolved conclusions would be repeated with variations until some resolution occurred. Dreams that led to unsatisfactory conclusions would occur less often than those which successfully dealt with problems. Every variation of those that seemed to work would likely occur over time.

The complex social and emotional lives of mammals would then be seen as a reflection of increased complexity both in consciousness and in dreaming. It wouldn't be a case of which caused which, as much as a reciprocal relationship: increased complexity of consciousness and dreaming leading to increased complexity of behavior, which leads to increased complexity of consciousness and dreaming . . . ad infinitum.

HUMAN DREAMS

We dream a world into being that dreams us into being.

(Richard Grossinger, in Russo, 1987: 191).

Earlier in this chapter, I speculated that, with the appearance of the neocortex, dreams should have improved upon the emotional complexity available to mammalian dreams. Primate dreams should have become increasingly better at modelling outer reality, especially visual reality. They should have begun to reflect upon experience, rather than just experience directly. Finally, like primate consciousness, dreams should have developed a primitive language, probably a symbolic language. With the expanded development of the neocortex in humans, all of the above characteristics should have been correspondingly elaborated in human dreaming. And, of course, that is exactly what we do experience in our dreams:

- " a striking visual landscape that improves upon that available in daytime life, because a dream can use any image or color necessary to paint the emotional picture the dream wants to construct
- " all levels of reflection: from dreams in which the dreamer is not present, but merely an outside observer; to dreams where the dreamer is deeply engaged in the drama of the dream; even to "lucid" dreams where the dreamer becomes aware that they are dreaming, while they are dreaming, and may even alter the dream while they continue to dream.
- " a symbolic language so developed that it can be interpreted successfully on any number of levels, from the reductionistic Freudian approach, to the expansion of Jungian dream analysis, to the variety of eclectic techniques now used by different schools of dream interpretation. What is so fascinating is that it is almost impossible to find an approach to a dream which doesn't yield psychic gold to the dream explorer.

In other words, the characteristics of human dreams exactly match what we would expect from examining the history of the brain's development. In the light of that history, Jung's contention that our dreams can access information acquired not in our lifetimes, but in the lifetime of our species, becomes much less far-fetched. His model of conscious and unconscious, interacting in dreams, becomes a reasonable description of the reality which closely matches scientific knowledge at this point in time.

Accordingly, I will assume that Jung's respect for dreams needs no further defense and will spend the next chapter unashamedly discussing the practical significance of dreams. My examination will barely skim the surface of dream work, but I hope it will at least encourage the reader to pay closer attention to his or her own dreams.

DREAMS AND CONSCIOUSNESS

Deeds were never invented, they were done. Thoughts, on the other hands, are a relatively late discovery. . . . First [man] was moved to deeds by unconscious factors, and only a long time afterwards did he begin to reflect upon the causes that had moved him; then it took him a very long time indeed to arrive at the preposterous idea that he must have moved himself -- his mind being unable to see any other motivating force than his own.

(Jung, *CW18*: 553).

As we have seen, consciousness is a very recent phenomenon. For millions of year, animals, and even humans, have managed to be born, live and die without the full awareness of self we think of as consciousness. We can feel joy and sadness, hope and fear, without being conscious of ourselves experiencing those emotions. The lack of consciousness doesn't create robots, moving inexorably to a pre-defined plan; the dynamics of the unconscious are much more complex than that.

Although archetypes necessary to our development are already in place when we are born, nevertheless no two humans (or other animals) have ever experienced those inherited behaviors and images in an identical way. Thus, despite the fact that

unconscious forces underlie our behavior, our lives are filled with choices (though we remain unconscious of many of those choices). However, it is nonetheless true that consciousness does definitely bring something new to the game of life.

The reason why consciousness exists, and why there is an urge to widen and deepen it, is very simple; without consciousness things go less well. This is obviously the reason why Mother Nature deigned to produce consciousness, that most remarkable of all nature's curiosities.

(Jung, CW8: 695).

Whether or not consciousness is nature's crowning achievement, it is certainly its newest novelty. No one respected consciousness, and the individual's heroic attempts to increase that consciousness, more than Jung. The individuation process, which he carefully studied, each aspect of which we will discuss in this book, is the process of extending consciousness. But all consciousness emerges out of the unconscious, the ultimate mother of all that lives. And dreams stand at that magical boundary between consciousness and the unconscious.

Because of this, major changes in our lives are mirrored in symbolic form in our dreams long before they are evidenced in outer life. This sometimes only becomes clear after the fact, when a long series of dreams can be examined. Frequently, in the period immediately before a major change is going to take place, a single dream will appear which depicts symbolically the entire course of a person's later development. The dream is so rich with meaning that it is impossible to fully understand at the time it first occurs. Later, smaller dreams pick up the individual strands of the changes that are coming. Slowing, ineluctably, they evolve as consciousness grows. Every conscious shift, every conscious resistance can be followed in the cycle of dreams.

Since there is an ongoing dynamic relationship between consciousness and the unconscious, it is natural that they would react to each other. If our conscious attitude

becomes too manifestly unhealthy from the viewpoint of the total organism, the unconscious will compensate. To consider a physical example, if our body detects a need for a trace element that has been missing from our diet, we tend to grow hungry for some food containing that missing chemical. Of course, living as so many of us do on hurriedly grabbed fast foods, we are not as aware of our body's messages as we would be if we were still living closer to nature. But all of us have, at sometime or another in our lives, suddenly developed a craving for food not normally in our diet: a vegetable perhaps, even if we would ordinarily shun vegetables.

This process appears to go on not only physically but within our psyche. Just as our body is constantly working to promote health and wholeness, so is our psyche. Accordingly, Jung felt that the primary function of dreams was to serve as an unconscious compensation to our conscious attitude. Of course, he means adult dreams, since there is no need for compensation until there is some consciousness to compensate for. Thus, Jung's view complements that of Humphrey presented in the last chapter, rather than contradicting it. In children, dreams are largely the playgrounds where future behavior and attitudes are tried out. As with adults, they are also the school where we learn appropriate modes of behavior and unlearn modes that don't work. As we become adults, there is less need for learning future behavior, more need to develop our full potentiality.

In this regard there are three possibilities. If the conscious attitude to the life situation is in large degree one-sided, then the dream takes the opposite side. If the conscious has a position fairly near the "middle," the dream is satisfied with variations. If the conscious attitude is "correct" (adequate), then the dream coincides with and emphasizes this tendency, though without forfeiting its peculiar autonomy.

(Jung, *CW8*: 546).

For example, if someone becomes a little too cocky, a little too sure that they have "the world by the tail," they are likely to dream of getting their comeuppance. If they

underrate someone, their dreams might present the despised person as an exalted figure, even a god. Unfortunately, things are rarely that obvious. Our conscious attitudes are more likely to be a complex mixture: some attitudes right on the money, some wildly out of line. Nor does life stand pat: attitudes which have been fine in the past may be inadequate in the present. Finally, there are few situations in life which don't require us to be able to hold both sides of an issue in mind, in order to judge the situation fairly. Life isn't easy.

THE UNCONSCIOUS NATURE OF DREAMS

The dream . . . cannot produce a definite thought unless it should cease to be a dream. . .

. The dream . . . manifests the *fringe of consciousness*, like the faint glimmer of the stars during a total eclipse of the sun.

(Jung, *CW18*: 511.)

Since dreams exist at the boundary between consciousness and the unconscious, once we record and interact with our dreams, a bridge begins to form between those two regions. With more rapid access between conscious and unconscious, growth and change accelerates. Once we become aware of our dreams, they react to our awareness. Then we observe their reaction and react in turn.

Some psychologists have theorized that dreams are not intended to be examined that way, and that doing so may cause damage to the psyche. In my experience, we don't have to worry that we will damage the natural process of growth. The unconscious seems to take care of that automatically. If the dreamer is not ready for some new piece of self-knowledge, they can examine their dreams as much as they like, and yet never notice the critical element. It goes by them as if they had never seen it at all.

This is because the unconscious is just that: not conscious; i.e., that which we are not yet able to be conscious of. Years ago, a friend attended a weekly dream group, led by a wonderfully elfish Jungian analyst, who I'll call Theodore here. One night he presented a recent dream of his own to the group. My friend had an insight into the dream, and was

able to help Theodore understand what the dream was about. The explanation clicked immediately with Theodore. He knew it was important and repeated the explanation over to himself several times.

Later in the evening, he asked my friend if he would tell him again what he had said about the dream. He had forgotten it completely. As soon as he heard the explanation, he said "of course, of course" and repeated it out loud to himself. Still later in the evening, with some embarrassment, he again asked my friend if he would mind repeating the explanation. Finally, as everyone was starting to leave at the end of the evening, Theodore plaintively asked him if he would mind going over it one final time. Clearly, if something is unconscious, it is very hard to make it conscious.

WORKING WITH YOUR DREAMS

No amount of skepticism and criticism has yet enabled me to regard dreams as negligible occurrences. Often enough they appear senseless, but it is obviously we who lack the sense and ingenuity to read the enigmatic message.

(Jung, *CW16*: 325).

Honor the dreams. It is more important to record them and review them than it is to figure out what they mean. Dreams are so filled with meaning that it is unlikely you can ever fully exhaust the meaning of even a single dream. That is an inevitable result of their coming from the unconscious. Any dream presents not only material that we are able to be consciously aware of, not only material at the edge of consciousness, but also material so far from consciousness that we may never become aware of why it is present in the dream.

Any person or object in a dream may represent either that actual person or object, or may be used as a symbol of some quality within your own personality. But normally you should assume the latter in working on your dreams, since dreams usually speak in symbolic terms. When you have dealt with enough dreams, you will often get a feeling for when they are speaking objectively rather than symbolically.

Pick out people and objects in your dreams and consider them as symbols. That is, look at everything you associate with that person or object. Try to determine which associations have the strongest significance for you first, but don't ignore any associations you may have. You are not trying to reduce the dream to a single explanation; rather you are trying to "amplify" it until it starts to resonate inside you in a powerful way. Remember that true dreams began with our mammalian ancestors, and are rooted in emotion. Accordingly, trust your emotions in judging when you are on the right track. Don't let your rational mind force you to a conclusion that your feelings disagree with.

It is helpful to have a good dictionary to look up the etymology of the word for an object or action in your dream. This is not in contradiction to what I have said about trusting emotions over thoughts in dealing with dreams: you are not looking for a single unique definition of your dream symbol; you are looking for the historical development of a symbol. And words are true symbols, carrying their whole history within themselves. If this sounds strange, just try it for a while and see if it doesn't frequently illuminate a dream that otherwise seemed inexplicable.

The first time a dream occurs, it may seem superficial and banally repetitive. The second time may be a month later or even forty years later. Existentially it is the same dream. . . .

As the process continues, the dream may finally be as brief as to achieve its utterance in a single note, a hiatus between the dreamer and semi-shrouded form, a face linked with a sound and then darkness. It is almost impossible to transcribe such a dream in language; it is a hieroglyph.

(Richard Grossinger in Russo, 1987: 205).

Again because of the symbolic language of dreams, they frequently speak in puns. For example, pioneer dream researcher Dr. Henry Reed once did a study of shoe dreams. He found that they most often occurred at critical transitional points in a person's life, when we need to reexamine our "standpoint", our basic view of life. That is, our shoes are the

point where we stand on the earth; hence, our "standpoint". If that sounds like a ridiculous pun, try it when you have a shoe dream.

Take another example (just as an example, don't assume that you can plug in a canned definition for a dream symbol): a common dream motif is to find yourself without any clothes. Play with that a little. You're naked, bare, exposed. Ah, that last one might ring a bell. Perhaps you have revealed too much and feel "exposed" in your life. But, of course, everything about the situation adds to the significance. Were you alone and naked in the dream? Surrounded by other people? Were you embarrassed in the dream? Or did you feel relaxed and comfortable in your exposure?

A patient once dreamed of digging up turnips from the earth of an alien planet. As we discussed the dream, he realized that "turnips" were a pun for "turn-ups"; i.e., that which he was turning up from the ground of the unconscious in his dreams. Puns occur so frequently in dreams that it is important to look for them constantly. However, every person has their own dream vocabulary, and people vary widely in the type and frequency of puns.

Remember Jung's discovery that dreams often repeat mythological themes. If some element in your dream reminds you of a myth (or fairy tale), read that myth and see if it doesn't help explicate your dream. Sometimes the structure of a dream will be so similar to a particular myth that this will be obvious. In those cases, it is helpful to carefully compare your dream with the myth in order to see how your personal version varies. The myth will give you a feeling for the general problem you're dealing with. Your personal variations will tell you a great deal about your unique angle on the problem.

Famed family therapist Carl Whitaker drew on this function of the unconscious in working with new patients. One of his favorite tools was to sit with a family and tell them "fractured fairy tales." At first, the family members thought they were hearing a traditional story, but somehow things became more and more distorted as Whitaker talked. Whitaker

trusted his unconscious to pick the right tale and to restructure it to fit the situation. What came out was always the story of the family he was treating, though so buried in metaphor that it affected the family members unconsciously rather than consciously.

Trust yourself when you feel a dream is very significant; if a dream feels very important, it usually is important. However, the opposite is not so clear. Sometimes a very important dream will seem unimportant because you don't yet want to face the issue dealt with in the dream. In those cases, give yourself a break and don't force yourself to face the issue yet if you don't feel comfortable. However, be aware that you may want to review earlier dreams at some later point. When you do, you may be shocked at just how important seemingly innocuous dreams really were.

For example, when a therapist was first discovering Jungian psychology, he became a "true believer," like many another convert to a "new faith". At that time, he dreamed that he was a salesman for Fundamentalist, psychoanalytic records. It would be hard to think of a better picture of a distorted conscious attitude. But, at the time, he didn't have the slightest idea what that dream was about.

Try unusual ways to connect with the dream. You can close your eyes and try to go back into the dream. If successful, return to some part of the dream that confused you and continue the dream. This is basically the technique Jung originated (at least in the modern Western world), which he called "Active Imagination." This seems a singularly apt term because, unfortunately, most of us have been taught to disdain fantasy, daydreams, imagination itself, as idle wastes of time. The idea that imagination and fantasy can be active is quite alien to modern Western thought.

There are many variations on the technique; for example, have a dialogue with the people or objects in your dream. One good way of doing this is to use the "two chair" technique pioneered by Fritz Perls, the founder of Gestalt psychotherapy: place two chairs

facing each other, then sit in one and imagine the person (or object) from your dream in the other chair. Say whatever comes to mind to that person. Then move to the other chair and pretend you are the other person (or object). Respond to yourself. Move back and forth between the two chairs to continue the dialogue. You will find this much easier to do than you might imagine. If you use this technique, try and record it on a tape recorder and later transcribe it into your journal.

Or forget the tape recorder and have the dialogue on paper. Try and relax first. If you know how to meditate, do so for a moment to center yourself. If you don't, here is an easy method: first sit comfortably and close your eyes. Become aware of your feet - pay no attention to the rest of your body. From there, move your awareness to the top of your head. Then to the middle of your chest. Move it around to other parts of your body until you feel comfortable about locating your awareness wherever you like. Then gently feel yourself as a whole. You will find that your breathing slows and deepens as you go through this process, which only takes a few moments.

Then carry on the dialogue with a person (or object) from your dream as with the chair technique. Except in this case record the two sides of the dialogue on paper. I prefer doing this at a word-processor. Others might find that too intrusive and prefer pen and paper. You might also draw, paint or sculpt your dream. Contrary to expectation, this is frequently more effective if you have little or no artistic facility. Or try giving your dream a name, as if it was a short story or play. You can elaborate that process and divide the dream into acts, list the protagonists and the action, etc. This is often very useful as dreams lend themselves to such dramatic devices.

In short, there are many, many ways to help work with your dreams. We will have more to say about specific aspects of dreams in later chapters. But the most important thing is to remember the dream and record it. Unless you do this, nothing else is possible.

Dreams form a record of the individuation process. In the next chapter, we will begin a discussion of the starting point for that process: Jung's concept of *psychological types*.