

**Keynote Address , 1<sup>st</sup> European Conference in Vilnius June 25 – 27, 2009  
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**The Cultural Unconscious and the Roots of Identity**

**Better:**

**The Cultural memory, the Cultural unconscious and the Roots of Identity**

The purpose of our meeting here in Vilnius is to celebrate a ritual of professional “We- Identity”.

All these Jungian gatherings, the international congresses, are meetings to assure our We- Identity, and our individual position in this “We-Identity”: Do we belong – or do we not belong any more? We are meeting friends, colleagues; we are talking about the past and creating fantasies about the future. It is a special atmosphere in which old memories are put in a new context: Not only personally, but also for our profession. The stories we tell, the ideas we share, the remembering together, the planning together, all gives us the experience of a “We-identity”, but also the feeling of an individual identity in the midst of this group. Coming together we assure ourselves in our identity. We do exist – we belong to a group, and we hope the group is respectable. If not, we form a subgroup.

Now we meet in Lithuania – with the newly formed Lithuanian group.

We remember together how this Lithuanian Jungian group has been formed and came to live, and how it is incorporated in the International Jungian Association. Coming here from all over the world means acknowledging and confirming the Identity of the Lithuanian group, but also of the Jungian group in general as an association in a constant process of transformation. .

## **Identity**

Identity is a complex concept because it is global: it belongs to psychology, sociology, cultural and political science, linguistics and so on. It answers to the questions: Who am I? Who are we? Who am I /are we in the view of others who matter? Who have I/ we been, who will we be in the future? Where am I like all the others human beings, where am I special, unique?

What belongs really to me, to us? Where do I belong ?

Individual identity means that through all the transformations in life we experience ourselves as a continuous “me” – we are the same even in changing – and we have a feeling of coherence. Being in rather different contexts, belonging to different groups, we have the experience of an identical me, a coherent ego complex.

These feelings of continuity and coherence we owe to the explicit autobiographical memory, the explicit episodic memory of our life history.

Identity is not only formed between the me and the other, Identity has to be

confirmed by the others. I am not only an acting subject; I am at the same time an object of the acting, object of the observation of the other. That allows us to take over the perspective of the other.

Identity – individual identity, cultural identity, professional identity – is always a “work in progress”. It is formed in the relationship between me and the other/ and the others in a broad sense, between me and the unconscious. In the concept of identity, the inner reality and the outer life meet (flow together).

### **The cultural memory, the cultural unconscious**

Whatever we are, whatever we learn – it is in relation to others. Especially at the beginning of our lives, we live in a “We-Identity”. The culture into which we are born is like the air we breathe. The social, the cultural identity, are first, the individual identity will never lose this root. Through imitation, identification and communication with the family and the familial surroundings, we get a feeling of having a safe identity, a feeling of knowing where we belong, because we are speaking the same language, we belong to the same part of the world, eat the same food. If we are fortunate we experience, in addition, good safe bonding which will strengthen lifelong our processes of identity. During life we can develop an individual identity embedded in the cultural identity. This would be the place for the Individuation process. Individual and collective identity is formed in social communication, not as opposites: Sociality and

Individuality are not in opposition, they presuppose each other: we have unique individual experiences in a shared culture.

**I propose a distinction between the Collective unconscious (Jung) and the cultural unconscious.**

I am not the first to propose this distinction. (Henderson, Singer and Kimbels and others)

My view: I consider the collective unconscious with the archetypes as being the biological bases common to all human beings, “the latent dispositions towards certain identical reactions”. (Jung in Wilhelm and Jung, 1972, p. 87) <sup>1</sup>

The collective unconscious can be understood as the universal biological base of culture.

### **The cultural memory / the cultural unconscious**

Archetypes per se are experienced as archetypal images. These archetypal images have to be translated into the language of the present. (GW 16, § 396)

And these archetypal images are influenced by different cultures. Mythological stories, fairy tales, they differ in different culture, even if, convincingly, the same topic is dealt with. Lithuanian fairy tales concerning Amor and Psyche differ from the corresponding Grimm fairy tales as we will see.

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<sup>1</sup> Wilhelm, R., **The Secret of the Golden Flower**, Routledge and Keegan, Paul, London, 1972.

These archetypal images are experienced by individuals, shaped by their personal complexes and shared in communication with others, and so inspire others as well.

What do I mean by the cultural memory and the cultural unconscious?

We always live in a cultural context, which is “selbstverständlich”, understood by itself, not reflected. Like the air we breath. It is just so, it is so in Switzerland, so we “are” – it is the unquestioned basis of identity, the root of identity. We can feel in strong opposition to aspects of our culture – but even the strong opposition is in the frame of our culture.

Shared symbols are the basis of a culture: Our languages, the narratives, the myths, the fairy tales, the favourite stories, the novels, the movies, our history, our specific music, art, religion, our favourite kind of science, and the values connected with all these areas – it just belongs to us. It is unconscious – we can become conscious about relevant aspects when we get in contact with a different culture, when we experience, for example, a difference in basic values in people from a different culture. From the problems with patients who are migrants, we know: it is tremendously stressful to leave the culture you are used to and to live in a different culture. You loose what is understood by itself, you have to reflect about small things – and that costs a lot of energy. The cultural memory is unconscious in the sense of a functional unconscious. Most of what we are doing is unconscious, we just do it, feel it, value it, that is how we are built and in this

regard the neuroscientist Roth says: it is just much easier and costs less energy to function in an unconscious way. It makes us free for other things which need reflection. It just relieves us when we do not need the conscious occupation.

We are able to handle a lot of problems in every day life due to cultural patterns which are shared with the group we belong to – it might even be a small group.

Culture shapes specific problems and provides ideas for solving those problems.

As I understand, relating to cultural memory, the cultural unconscious is not primarily a “dynamic unconscious”, it is a functional unconscious. Aspects of it can become a dynamic unconscious and we can in this respect talk about cultural complexes: if in a culture some aspects of the history have to be repressed, or split of, comparable to family complexes, due to secrets in a family which must not to be acknowledged we can just as well talk about cultural complexes.

The functional cultural unconscious consists of the memory of the specific culture. We have personal memories, family memories, cultural memories, which we feel belong to me, belong to us, or perhaps the opposite is true: we belong to them. (Gadamer, German philosopher) In this memory is much more knowledge than I personally can know.

**The cultural unconscious is a communicative memory (Harald Welzer) <sup>2</sup>**

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<sup>2</sup> Welzer Harald (2005) Das kommunikative Gedächtnis. Eine Theorie der Erinnerung. Beck, München

The communicative conditions shape most of our memory and our experience of a me and a “we”. (Or an “us”?) So we can also speak of a communicative unconscious. (Welzer S.225)

A proof for that comes from linguistics. Linguists like Lakoff speak of a cognitive unconscious. This comes from studying how we understand language. Even if there are gaps, we know how a sentence will end – even if we don’t know it, we do it unconsciously due to a communicative memory. Goffmann also studied the everyday communication in human beings, saying – and this is a central finding: “You tend to speak as you expect that the other expects you to speak.”

That means: We may think of an autonomous decision, but it might be a decision in dependence of the social network we are in, of our physical connection...The autobiographical memory synthesizes all those influences and creates an idea of a continuing “me” and of “my identity” – but the me and my identity and the we- identity are formed by interactions with “the other” and it is activated (constellated) in relationship with others.

(Siegel: Human connectedness (Verknüpfung) produces neuronal connections.)

Our experience of being unique – which is also a part of identity – is due to the mixture of genetics, historic, social, psychological, cultural and communicative conditions. (Welzer, S. 235 f.)

**It could be helpful to distinguish the communicative memory from the cultural memory:**

**Both form the cultural unconscious.**

The communicative memory means the actual communication of experience – comparable to the short term memory of society. The communicative memory changes with the present, it is close to actual life. It is a living memory, suggesting permanently a me - and a we – identity. We circumscribe the past fitting it for the present: you prove, you are the same – you prove your continuity and you get the confirmation by the others that you are the same – both are the same: the speaker and the listener. This communicative memory is fluid, changing, wandering with presence.

**The cultural memory** (Assmann, Aleida and Jan)<sup>3</sup>

starts, when no one is still alive who experienced by himself a specific situation, for example a historic event. But: The historic event is fixed, formed in texts, rites, monuments. The cultural memory is a constituent for the identity of a we – group. Each society, each époque owns and takes care of a stock of texts, images, monuments, rites which are stabilising and communicate to others the self image of a society, a stock of knowledge on which the whole group

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<sup>3</sup> Assmann Jan (1997, 2007) Das kulturelle Gedächtnis, Beck, München

participates and which creates the experience of belonging together and of the special characteristics of a group. (Assmann, S. 88)

The relevant group gets into contact with these contents in a more institutional communication, and through institutional communication: memorial days, recitations of texts, the past can become conscious, can be reflected. In the cultural memory we have archives, images, patterns of behaviour, we have stored knowledge. Out of those cultural funds we can use what we need for understanding the actual present situation, for the assurance of the we-identity.

If new ideas are constellated in a group, we look for the roots of these ideas in the cultural memory. (Comparable to the individual: If we experience something “new” in our lives, we find (not search) the roots for the new behaviour in the past.) This creates the experience of identity.

In the communicative memory the members of a group decide which aspects of the past are important for them, have to be discussed, and which meaning they give to those aspects. We can ask, which aspects of the cultural memory is in resonance with the actual discourse. (Nazi past in Germany, Swiss freedom myth in Switzerland when the US wants us to disclose the secret of the banks) Because we are in resonance with cultural images, patterns, behaviours – we discuss them, translate them in the language of the present, the cultural memory is – even when fixed – in a slow process of transformation. The history will be

rewritten, corresponding to the saying of Jung: “Eternal truth needs a human language that alters with the spirits of the times.” (Jung, CW 16, § 396)

So there is a transition from the communicative memory to the cultural memory. The communicative memory allows changes in identity without losing the roots. That is which makes the culture change.

### **Dialogue at the threshold between East and West**

The culture, the cultural unconscious gives us a feeling of identity, it is a map of meaning, incorporated in important texts, in religion, in songs, in behaviour which is understood by itself.

In the Internet, when Googling for Lithuania, I found a remarkable statement:

“there exists a sound reason for saying that culture is the mainstay of the survival of Lithuania...The Lithuanians had managed to preserve their national identity, in other words their culture, language, literature, art and traditions...during the years of Soviet occupation; culture became a shelter of spiritual resistance. Culture assisted Lithuanians in protecting their identity...In May 1990, immediately following the declaration of independence, the largest Cultural Congress in the history of Lithuania assembled in Vilnius. Several thousand delegates debated the status of culture and discussed the tasks the

nation would encounter during the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”( Internet: Lithuania Culture – A part of Randburg)

Culture is seen in this statement not only as basis for the identity, but even more so and in connection with the basis of identity as a means of survival.

Is everything ok then? Why then a dialogue at the threshold between East and West?

Giving a seminar in Vilnius, once a colleague from Vilnius started to say: “our colleagues in Europe... he was interrupted: Hey, we are Europe too... laughter...”

Or: “We have a much deeper connection to fairy tales than you Europeans have.” In this situations we claim for differentiation. Who are the Europeans? But besides: the colleagues told us, that they feel a deep connection with fairy tales – which is unique. This is a self - definition.

Such situations mirror the experience of being at the threshold, the emotional feeling connected with it shows that you are in between, in a tension. Or: in a creative process, identity has to change, you have an option of gaining new aspects of a cultural identity. Even if there is a sound cultural basis, the question of belonging arises in a new form, especially when politics is changing:

Belonging to the European Union – or only a bit? Actually I believe we are

always in our cultural identities at a threshold – more or less – but I understand that it is more here and now due to political changes with tensions and anxieties but also the option of a fresh reflection of identity and changes of identity.

### **The transcultural transitional space**

If you are in between, you need a space for being quiet in between: the concept of the transitional space, the potential space of Winnicott can be of help. This concept is nowadays used for transcultural psychology and psychiatry, working with migrants, who are faced with a new culture. The concept is connected with finding a safe identity in a different culture from your own.<sup>4</sup>

The transitional space is a third space allowing one to unite what has been separate before: the inner/individual world versus the outer/ cultural reality, what belongs to you and what belongs to the other. The tension which arises constantly by the cultural differences can be borne. As a consequence anxiety gets reduced; new ways of understanding and behaviour are accessible.

In a transitional space the cultural unconscious becomes conscious, what has been implicit knowledge can become explicit and can be discussed and reflected, and change can happen. In a cultural transitional space – what belongs to your culture and what belongs to the other culture – can be seen, discussed and it will change the cultural beliefs for all. Migration seems to be

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<sup>4</sup> Wohlfahrt Ernestine, Zaumseil Manfred (ed.) (2006) *Transkulturelle Psychiatrie – Interkulturelle Psychotherapie*. Springer, Heidelberg

Nadig Maja: *Transkulturelle Spannungsfelder in der Migration und ihre Erforschung*. In: Wohlfahrt (2006), S. 67-80)

one of the most powerful source of changes in the human society.<sup>5</sup> In the process of dialogue in the transcultural transitional spaces there might arise chaotic situations, which are contained by this space, and so new meanings can be experienced, new perspectives can be shared. Human relationships by human beings from different cultures can be experienced as a potential space for the development of shared symbols of cultural meaning.

Winnicott: "... the third part of the life of a human being , a part that we cannot ignore, is an intermediate area of *experiencing* to which inner reality and external life both contribute. It is an area that is not challenged, because no claim is made on its behalf except that it shall exist as a resting-place for the individual engaged in the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated." <sup>6</sup>

And the connection to culture in the words of Winnicott:

"I am claiming: The place where cultural experience is located is the *potential space* between the individual and the environment (originally the object)." S.

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(I for myself would not stress the object, as objects are always a part of the environment.)

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<sup>5</sup> Ulrich Herbert, Freiburg (2009) lecture given at the LPTW. Völkerwanderung eine historische Vergewisserung. (see Lptw.de, CD (in german) available : info@auditorium-netzwerk.de

<sup>6</sup> Winnicott D W (1971) *Playing and Reality*, Routledge, London, p.2

... and later: “The potential space happens only *in relation to a feeling of confidence* on the part of the baby, that is confidence related to the dependability of the mother-figure or environmental elements, confidence being the evidence of dependability that is becoming introjected.” ( S.100)

Transferring these ideas of Winnicott, we can understand the potential space as a transcultural transitional space. This space is a kind of a area of identity forming and protect until a new more stable identity has been established. It is a space where experiences which are not understood and which creates anxieties are allowed to be expressed and shared. It requires of all who are in charge the openness to listen to the other, to express their standpoint and to find solutions. Communication in this space needs trust and provides trust. No culture is better than the other, but they are different – and more different than we think.

#### A vignette

The problem of a 36 year old woman from Mali (Africa), married for the past 8 years to a Swiss man, was presented to me by her counsellor in supervision. The counsellor for education feared the woman could become psychotic, she reacted in a way paranoiac, and she – the counsellor - had lost emotional contact with her. The problem: the husband and the counsellor found the two girls, 4 and 6, are retarded in their development and should be supported with special means. The mother of the children opposed to this idea very much, saying, her girls are

completely fine. She reacted with anxiety when the father and the counsellor seemed to have the same opinion and she started to talk about how Swiss people are against her.

It is obvious: the three do not share the same values concerning the development of children. Forming an intercultural transitional space means to talk about developmental needs for girls in Mali and in Switzerland. But also about basic values from father and mother: the father of the children found, you have to go ahead in life – and for that you need a lot of self assertion. She, the mother, found, you have to fit harmoniously in life with the environment. As the counsellor and her husband seemed to share their values, she felt lost and was against everything. Talking about those values – in the conviction that the values are different, but no one is better than the other -, she could reflect the differences and the problems she faced with Swiss school system. All three changed a bit and tried to find solutions they are able to accept.

Let`s come back to the Lithuanians

They are not people in migration, but our colleagues feel they are at the threshold between East and West, and we hear the same by people from other Baltic states even in TV discussions, talking about Identity vis a vis the EU. It is a question of finding a new identity, and - perhaps the moment to think more about such transitional spaces.

One problem in this regard seems to be the problem of evaluating the importance of East and West during the epochs. Among some Europeans, for instance, there is a prejudice that good things come from the West, and more barbarian things from the East. And here we could find a cultural complex. An intercultural transitional space would allow us to question these old prejudices. It is not the question of good or not good, the question would be: what is it? It has not to be discussed in a general way, it has to be discussed in specific topics which bother both parties. What contributes to a relevant discourse in the East, what in the West? How does it look like? Can it inspire? It could cover important aspects of the constellated communicative memory and contents of the cultural memory.

Asked for our profession it means that Jungian concepts can be questioned from a Lithuanian perspective.

### Practical

I will now try to create such a transitional space by talking about the best known Lithuanian fairy tale - Grazina told me almost each Lithuanian knows this fairy tale.

It is called: Egle the Queen of serpents. In the Classification of fairy tales by Arne Thompson it is number 425 M.

In category 425 are clustered the fairy tales with motifs of an animal bridegroom, for example “The Beauty and the Beast”, or “The Lifting, Leaping Lark (Das singende springende Löweneckerchen, KHM 88). (425 A, 425 C) Egle, Queen of Serpents, is proposed as Type 425 M, a special version of 425 and this type is only found in the Baltic area – but there in more than one hundred different versions.

If I want to talk about the correspondence and the differences of these fairy tales, we are in a transitional space – which could be a space to meet and to dialogue between East and West.

### **Egle the Queen of Serpents**

A couple, living in a farm, has 12 sons and three daughters, the youngest of whom is called Egle.

Once upon a time the three daughters go to swim. After leaving the water Egle finds a serpent, a grass snake on her clothes. This serpent will not go away, saying: “Egle, only if you marry me, I give you back your clothes. Egle does not want to do it. But she wants her clothes back and finally agrees to marry the snake, hoping for a good way out of the situation. Three days passed and all the serpents in the land showed up together at the farm of the family. The whole family was scared, while all the serpents began to slither around in wild abandon.

Finally, the father promised to give his daughter to the serpent.

When Egle came to the sea, she met not a serpent but a handsome young man, her bridegroom Zilvinas, who was waiting for her by the beach. He told her that it was him who had been the serpent in her clothes. They all moved to a nearby island, and from there, under the earth and from there under the sea. Finally there was the Serpent's palace – filled with guests. Egle calmed down. They lived happily – no work – only festivities – and she bore four children: three sons, one daughter. But one day the eldest son asked her, where her parents live and proposed to visit them. Egle had completely forgotten them until this very moment. But now she remembered, and she wanted to see them desperately. Her husband, the serpent, did not like the idea.

So he said: “Fine, go and visit, but first you have to spin this tuft of silk”, and he showed her the spindle. She spun and spun, and spun – she saw she had been tricked. So she went to an old woman nearby, a known sorceress, and asked her advice. “Throw it into a fire.” She does it – and out comes a toad which is creating silk from its body. Egle went back to her husband, pleading to go for a short visit. Now her husband gave her a pair of iron shoes, telling her, when she had worn them down, she could visit her parents. She knew, it was a trick. So she went back to the old woman, asking for advice. The sorceress told her to go to a blacksmith and ask him to burn them. She did as she was told, and

afterwards in three days Egle worn the shoes down. Fine, said the serpent, but for the journey you have to bake a rabbit-pie. But he ordered that all cooking utensils be hidden – Egle was not able to bake a pie.

Again she turned to the old lady for advice. Grandmother said: “Spread out the sifted leavening, immerse the sieve in water, and mix the dough in it.”

Egle did as she was told and went out with her children to her homeland. The serpent told her to not to stay away for longer than nine days.

“When you return go alone, just you and the children and when you approach the beach then call for me:

Zilvine, Zilvineli

If alive, may the sea foam milk

If dead, may the sea foam blood...

If you see coming towards you foaming milk, I am alive, if blood comes I am dead.

And he warns the children not to let anyone know this secret.

Returning to her homeland, Egle feels great joy. She described her life with the grass snake, the serpent king. Everyone was glad and in great spirits; Egle did not even feel the nine days pass.

At this time, the parents and the brothers started to wonder how they could keep Egle in their midst. They decided they had to find out, how Egle had to call her husband at the beach. The brothers called her eldest son, Azuolas, and cornered

him and questioned him, but he kept the secret. They threatened him to not to tell his mother of their actions. The same happened with the second son, with Uosis, then with the third son, Berzas. But they could not get the secret, even when threatened and beaten. Finally they took Drubele, the youngest. First she did, like her brothers, claiming to not know the secret. But the sight of the rod frightened her and she told all.

All twelve brothers went to the beach and called Zilvine.

When he surfaced, all the brothers fell to chopping the serpent to pieces.

After nine days had passed, Egle went to the sea and called for her serpent. The sea shook and floating towards Egle was a foam of blood. And she heard the voice of the beloved husband:

“Your twelve brothers cut me down with their scythes; my call was given to them by our Drebulė, our most beloved daughter!”

With great sorrow and thundering anger she turned to her children, turning Drebulė into a willow, “may you shiver day and night, may the rain cleanse your mouth, may the wind comb your hair...”

And to her sons: Stand my sons, strong as trees. I, your mother, will remain a fir.

“As she commanded so it came to be: and now the oak, ash and birch are the strongest of our trees, while the willow to this day will shake at the slightest whisper of a wind for she quaked before her uncles and gave away her true father.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Summary by Danute Bindokiene, in the Internet, slightly changed by Verena Kast

An embarrassing and a sad ending! Or not?

Sure, there are different variations, also in 425 A and C. The most striking difference concerns the redemption of the enchanted husband. In “The Beauty and the Beast” - returning from home too late, the girl finds the Beast in the courtyard dying - and with a kiss, the Beast turns into a beautiful prince. In the fairy tale “The Liling, Leaping Lark”, the Husband - because light fell on him - was transformed into a dove. For seven years his wife followed the dove - and finally after some more problems at the Red Sea, the dove spell can be lifted. In the fairy tale of Egle this part is missing, instead we have five trees, perhaps standing close to the beach. The Serpent is dead. And this creates a feeling of sadness, of a loss, even of terror - knowing that the grass snake in Lithuania as a symbol of life energy is absolutely not to be killed. We have the transformation into trees: as Egle and her children had names of trees - even when living under the sea -, it looks like a prediction of what could, what should happen.

The Fairy tales of the “The Beauty and the Beast” type are linked with the myth of Amor and Psyche. And this myth elaborates the transformation in relationship: Aphrodite, the goddess of love, is not in relationship. She is able to seduce men - just with her body - as she is so beautiful. We do not hear about a relationship which would be pleasant for her and her partner. Psyche is a devotee of Aphrodite, but through her search for the lost amor, through her

quest, she develops relationship – and now there is not only sexuality and seduction, but also love, passion, attachment. What would 425 M tell us about this topic?

For discussing important topics from different cultures in a cultural transitional space, there must be people from both cultures. I am opening up questions from a cultural background in which 425 A, C are “common” and 425 M has to be questioned. If we want to create a intercultural transitional space – the same could be done and should be done from a Lithuanian standpoint. Then we could have really a dialogue concerning these fairy tales and the associated cultural convictions and feelings. So what I am doing here is just a beginning and an invitation to our Lithuanian colleagues.

Let’s see first, why Egle is a fairy tale 425 M:

In the Aarne / Thompson description of the Folktales Types we find a description of the parts for each type, that are more or less essential for this type of fairy tale.

In this case, it is ( ATH S. 140)

- I. The Monster as Husband
- II. Disenchantment of the Monster
- III. Loss of the Husband

IV. Search for Husband: She undergoes a sorrowful wandering in iron shoes, needs advices by sun, moon, old woman...

V. Recovery of Husband

In the fairy tale of Egle, we have

I and II – the tasks which are in IV, we have in the world of the Serpent King, how he is sometimes called, his trying to hinder his wife in going home to her family. We have then III Loss of the husband. Instead of Recovery we have the transformation to trees. Could this be a sort of recovery? Or is it a standstill? Or do we have in this fairy tale a mix between the tale 425 M and a creation myth? A myth about how the strong trees and the shivering willow tree have come into existence?

Let us reflect some more about this fairy tale.

The monster is here the sacred serpent of the Balts, the harmless grass snake, indigenous to the Baltic region, (*Natrix tripodontus*, Ringelnatter) its colour grass green or dark grey.

Finding such a serpent is seen as a good omen, it being the symbol for happiness, prosperity of the soil and of the family, symbol for a prosperous sexual life, a symbol for life energy. It is said that Zaltys (grass snakes) possess the knowledge of healing and healing herbs. It can be the guardian spirit of a home: Even nowadays occasionally rooftop crossbeams are topped with

carvings of reptilian shape. As symbols for the life energy, the regenerative life force, it is not to be killed – you have to provide a quiet space for it.

The fairy tale tells us about a prosperous couple, farmers, with 12 sons and three daughters.

This family has been blessed by the grass snakes!

Getting in contact with the element water, the daughters get also in contact with the grass snake, no way to avoid this animal – no way to avoid transformation.

The grass snake wants to marry the youngest of three daughters – a bonding between grass snake and the girl – the marriage of an animal with a human being, understood in western Europe as the animal bridegroom, the idea, that an animal projection onto the partner has to be taken away, or: that a new connection between male and female is possible, a new kind of bonding, even when the bridegroom is seen as a grass snake. In comparable fairy tales it is just an ugly beast, or it is a lion, a bear, a wolf – something wild, untamed. The grass snake seems to be a little different – and that is perhaps the reason, while coming to the beach, and usually full of anxiety about the unknown danger which will happen, the fairy tale sets our minds at ease: The grass snake is a handsome young man – in comparable fairy tales the husband is a lion during the day, and a handsome man during the night.

In our fairy tale they move far away from land: to a nearby island, then under the earth and under the sea – there is the palace of the grass snake. This is

special: Egle (her name means fir tree) is married to the grass snake, far away from home, under the earth, under the sea – and there is a wonderful life.

Fantasies about love, a great new world connected with love, full of freedom – but far away from home, from the places where you have to realize inner experiences. And this life – far away – is prosperous again: Egle gives birth to 3 sons, and a daughter, all with names of trees, Azuolas – oak tree, Uosis – ash-tree, Berzas – birch tree, and the daughter Drebulė, aspen - tree. Egle was so at ease in this wonderful world that she forgot her family. The oldest son asked about - where are they came from, about parents – he started a process of memory and longing after quite a long time. The connection to the old family or to the principle of reality takes much longer in this fairy tale than in the comparable ones.

But even now, and this is special, she is not allowed to just go back. The three tasks we know from different fairy tales to get back the lost husband, should avoid the separation and keep her and her children in the beyond, in this dreamy state. Only with the tricks of an old wise woman – who is also there, she can go home.

Zilvine, the husband, surfaced with them, telling them how to call him, when they are back after nine days, and warning the children about letting anyone know this secret. That means: he knows that the children will disclose the secret. The children, the bearer of the future of life, have to stay on earth. And there is

no possibility of recovery of the bloody sea foam – it has no form, no structure.

(In the Baltic mythology the water of the sea has its origin in blood)

Could it mean that the brothers of Egle, the vigorous attitudes, kill this longing for the feelings under the sea – or: is it the wrong way to deal with the serpent ?

I do not believe it. As the children already have tree names, I conclude it was their fate to become trees.

You could say: Because Egle was so full of sorrow about the loss of her beloved husband, she wanted to become a tree – but is not only a weeping willow, it is the tree that has been expressed in her name, a fir.

I favour two ideas about the transformation into trees:

As trees they can be close to the sea. The fairy tale would explain the etiology of the tree cult in Lithuania, and insofar it is a myth of creation and tells us how the sacred aspect of the grass snake through the love of Egle has been transferred to the trees, makes them sacred trees. More so, as the grass snake, Zelvini has also the name of a tree, his name means willow – tree!

More psychological: Opposite to the suction into the depths, into fascination of old ideas, we have the idea of the tree, grounded in the earth, growing into the sky. The grass snake would have been the transformer: we have not only sea and land, but also the trees.

So the grass snake has not to be searched for and not to be recovered – it is symbol of the life energy – which takes different forms.

So nothing with Amor and Psyche? Or in a quite different form?

Usually in the end of type 425 fairy tales we are pleased – the protagonists in the fairy tales are happy – they reunite with the children they left at home – and they lived happily even after. As we have no happy couple in the Egle fairy tale, does the tale tell us, that nature and the connection to nature is more important than bonding? Is it a different kind of love and relationship?

Here, the fairy tale ends with feelings of longing, sadness, melancholy – the feelings which usually lead us to the depth – more than happiness. Identifying with the trees we feel structure against this suction of the deep feelings. We could think about the wives of fishermen looking on the water of the sea, on the horizon, hoping that her husbands are coming back...

The fairy tale – so it is said – is written in 1880. At that time, Lithuanian people were not allowed to use the Lithuanian language or Latin letters. Is there an influence of this most beloved fairy tale of the Lithuanians? Hope for a better future? Or: whatever brings the future, you have to stand like trees?

The dealing with this fairy tale is my gift for a transcultural transitional space I hope we can create in this conference.

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