RIVER SYMBOLISM

Part I

BY WILLIAM G. NIEDERLAND, M.D. (NEW YORK)

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A boy sixteen months old is taken to a seaside resort for the first time in his life. The parents sit with him on the sandy beach a hundred yards from the shore. From where they sit the water can hardly be seen, but the roar of the waves is heard in the distance. Soon the child bestirs himself, gets up from his reclining position, looks in the direction of the water and starts running, apparently oblivious of everything else, toward the sea. When he reaches it, he runs straight into the water requiring restraint from going in deeper. With expressions of joy and happiness, he plays with the waves, laughing, shouting, clasping his hands and rocking his body eagerly and incessantly. Refusing to leave the water, he has to be carried out of it. Without

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An abbreviated version of this paper was read before The New York Psychoanalytic Society, September 25, 1956.

THE PSYCHOANALYTIC QUARTERLY

VOLUME
TWENTY-FIVE

1956

HE PSYCHOANALYTIC QUARTERLY, INC.
WEST 57th STREET, NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

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pause, the boy immediately begins the same game and marches directly toward the sea. He dashes into it and is almost delirious in his play with the waves. This scene repeats itself time and time again well into the afternoon, until the parents carry the child home. The child remains in a happy mood which continues throughout the day. Of course, the reverse of this, the phobic avoidance of water by children, can also be observed frequently.

In the United States a trip to Niagara Falls is the traditional goal of young honeymooners. The goal of European honeymooners is often Venice, 'the seaborn city'.[1] Jones *(42)* states that in Canada, the town of Niagara is commonly known as 'the Baby City' from the large number of conceptions that date from a visit there. In Italy the best known 'baby city' is Salsomaggiore, a resort near Milan, where there are many springs and fountains. Years ago, I rather naïvely asked the professor of gynecology at the University of Milan about the allegedly curative effect of these waters upon female sterility. The old professor merely shook his head and said: 'About the potency of the waters in Salsomaggiore we do not know a thing; but about the potency of the many young men living there, we know quite a bit'. The reputation of Niagara Falls and Salsomaggiore waters is equaled if not surpassed by other places. *Monumenta Historica Norwegiae (36)*, a collection of medieval data about Norway, has an account of a country discovered by Norwegian seamen 'where virgins become pregnant through drinking water'. Adam von Bremen, a geographer of the eleventh century, places this country in the Gulf of Bothnia near Finland. In 330 A.D. an anonymous traveler published a manuscript, Itinerary from Bordeaux to Jerusalem, in which he told of 'the mountain Syna where there is a fountain in which, if a woman bathes, she becomes pregnant'.

That water, especially flowing water, is the most important agent in fecundity is universal. In ancient Greece it was custom-

[1] For centuries the most impressive festivity celebrated in Venice was the annual wedding of the doge and the sea, *Lo Sposalizio*, when the doge threw a gold ring into the Adriatic and exclaimed: *'Desponsamus te, Mare . . .'* .

ary for the bridegroom to go to the local river to bathe and sprinkle himself with water, 'praying by this token for the begetting of children . . . since the water from a stream was considered life-begetting and generative' *(60)*. According to Pliny and other Roman authors, drinking water from the 'offspring-giving Nile' enabled the inhabitants of ancient Egypt to give birth to more than three children at a time. As late as 1653, Izaak Walton, less interested in the propagation of man than that of fish, wrote: 'Eels are bred of a particular dew falling in the month of May or June on the banks of some particular ponds or rivers . . .'. Among the Trobriand Islanders pregnancy is not attributed to sexual intercourse, but to a Baloma or ghost. The ghost usually enters the woman while she is bathing.

Suffice it at this point to add a few linguistic observations. The word, river, derived from the Latin *rivus* is related to *ripa* (bank, shore). The English words to 'rive' (separate, tear asunder) and 'rival' stem from the same root. Another Latin word for river is *fluvius,* floss in English and *Fluss* in German. The German *Fluss* has direct gynecological connotations, such as *Weissfluss,*[2] meaning leucorrhea, and *Rotfluss,* meaning menstruation. Though these connotations are lacking in English, they are represented in such expressions as 'flow' or 'profuse flow' for copious menstruation. The word creek also has a sexual meaning. From the Norse *kriki,* and the French *crique,* it originally designated a cleft or crevice. The Scottish word *riva* also denotes a cleft in a rock. There is still another Latin word for river, *amnis.* Though it cannot be proved that this term is related to amnion and amniotic fluid, derived from the Greek *amnion* meaning membrane, the resemblance in sound is noteworthy. Nor can I prove that the Latin *amnis* is the same as *omnis,* all. They too are close in sound. There is a river in eastern Germany called *Alle,*[3] all. Lake, besides denoting an inland

[2] In an old German joke the question is asked: *Welches ist der gefährlichste Fluss?* What is the most dangerous river? The answer is: *Der Weissfluss,* that is, gonorrhea or leucorrhea.

[3] Jones, in his paper on salt symbolism *(41)*, has demonstrated the close connection of many of these terms with the idea of salt as a symbol of fecundity.

body of standing water, also refers to an expanded part of a river. Ocean originally meant the all-encircling river supposed to encompass the earth. The most important river, according to the Bible, is the Euphrates, one of the four rivers of Paradise, also known as 'the great river' in the Old Testament. Its Hebrew name is *Perath,* because its waters are fruitful (*parin,* same root as *Perath*) and give health to man. The first command in the Bible uses the same root: *Pru Urwu*—'be fruitful and multiply'. Of some interest is the sequence in which this command to propagate appears in the scriptural text. First it is mentioned in connection with 'the waters teeming with living creatures . . . be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas' (Genesis I, 20-22). Later it is addressed to man: 'be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth' (Genesis I, 28).

To return to the Biblical name of the Euphrates, which characterizes the river as giver of fertility, a derivative of this idea is probably inherent in the English word 'offspring'. In the Bible the root *parin* is used for unborn or newborn children in such frequent expressions as 'the fruit of the womb', 'the fruit of the loins', 'the fruit of the body', usually rendered as offspring in English.

How closely the ideas of river and body are connected can be seen in such terms as 'river-head' (source), 'arm' (branch), and 'mouth'. According to Onians *(60)* the source of a stream was called its head because of the ancient belief that the head contained the life-fluid, the seed, and thus the source of life. The Latin name for the contents of the head, the brain, *cerebrum,* is derived from the old verb *cereo,* better known as *creo,* I beget, and as the name of Ceres, the goddess of fertility. In the human body the head was thought to be the source or fountain-head of the liquid seed; for instance, *Augustinus inquit spermatem ex cerebro esse (59).* This idea is, of course, known to us from the masturbation fantasies of male patients who feel their brain being dried out or drained off by the outflowing semen. Also the expressions 'river-bed', and 'river-run' are noteworthy in this connection. There exists a linguistic parallelism between spring

and brook. The former denotes a natural source of water springing forth spontaneously; the latter, related to the verb 'to break', originally signified water breaking forth from the earth. A profusion of metaphorical connotations to the idea of river exists in many languages, and modern English abounds in terms relating to river which today are rarely recognized as such. An example is the verb, meander, derived (also a river term) from the Mæander River *(61)* and its particularly winding course. Rivers of blood, of oil, of talk, and words such as influx, afflux, and confluence are of course common expressions. To rivet meant to fasten a ship to a river bank; to arrive stems from late Latin *arripare,* to get ashore, i.e., *ad ripam.* The old Anglo-French *arrivaille* originally meant having reached a place from a distance by water, usually after a river journey. The German word for journey, *Reise,* is probably also a term related to river in the same way as the English rise and raise. In fact, the principal characteristic of rivers, besides water, is motion. In the words of Pascal, 'Rivers are roads that move'.

CLINICAL OBSERVATIONS

Elsewhere *(58)* I discussed certain clinical and cultural aspects of what I described as the symbolic equation of river, sister, breast, and mother. I called attention to the rich material in Friedman's *(30)* recent study of the symbolism of bridges, in Freud's *(25, 27),* Ferenczi's *(20, 21),* and Jones's *(40, 41)* earlier contributions to the subject, and to various observations in papers by M. Bonaparte *(11)* and Lewin *(49)* which seem to suggest that the peculiar intensity of feeling, 'the mixture of nostalgia and anxiety which gets hold of mankind on the brink of water', is connected with a universal symbolism that embraces life, birth, love, guilt, and death. The numerous myths and legends of river births and deaths, about male and female deities residing in streams and other waters, about mysterious rivers separating life from death, about the hidden wonders and secrecies of the aquatic realm in general, seem to reflect the universality of this symbolism.

It is well known that the unconscious mother symbolism of water is chiefly derived from the fact that, in the words of M. Bonaparte *(11)*, 'all waters into which one enters or from which one emerges are universal symbols of the water wherein we actually dwelt, from which we actually came forth—the amniotic water'. Abraham *(1)* puts it succinctly: 'Water [in a dream] stands for the amniotic fluid'. Other body fluids such as milk, saliva, urine, semen, and blood contribute essential elements to this symbolism. The amniotic theory of water symbolism, usually understood ontogenetically, has been further expanded by Ferenczi *(22)* who speaks of phylogenetic roots of this fantasy in his admittedly speculative monograph, Thalassa.

The first fluids to play a role in the infant's life are mother's milk, and its own saliva, urine, and feces. They represent the earliest flowing liquids that exist for the infant. One 'aquatic' event in the immediate prehistory of the neonate has, however, to be mentioned in this connection. This event, which is part of the process of birth, is the rupture of the amniotic membranes, commonly called the breaking of the waters. Without discussing the controversial question of birth trauma, this is merely to note that in the biological process of birth, the crucial phase begins with a sudden 'flood' which usually occurs shortly before the expulsion of the fœtus from the uterus. It is at that moment that the first great change in the environment of the fœtus occurs. What can be called the warm water world of the fœtus comes to a sudden end with the rupture of the membranes and the resultant radical change in its environment. It abruptly takes on different qualities of shape, size, consistency, and pressure. The use of the expression 'water world' here alludes to the maternal abode of the fœtus as well as to the universal myths of floods which accompany legends about the end of the world. There can be little doubt that the 'world' in the unconscious is the inside of the maternal body. It can further be said that of all the uterine products expelled at birth, it is not the fœtus that is born first, but the amniotic fluid. If premature rupture occurs with resultant dry labor, or if hydramnion is

present, the 'flood' bursting forth from the uterine 'world' not only precedes by some time the actual delivery, but can also be of great intensity and quantity.

It seems to me that this particular phase of the birth process deserves closer analytic attention than it has so far received, in view of certain clinical data not fully explained. I refer to dreams of awakening which represent at the same time dreams of birth.[4] According to Freud *(25)*, 'birth is regularly expressed by some connection with water'. He further states that 'diving into the water is emerging from the water, i.e., being born or reborn' and that water dreams are, generally speaking, birth dreams. In another passage Freud *(25)* states again: 'Birth is almost invariably represented [in dreams] by some reference to water: either we are falling into water or clambering out of it, saving someone from it or being saved by them. . .'. Silberer *(68)* has recorded dreams in which awakening appears as coming out of or crossing a river. One of these dreams was: 'I am crossing a brook, standing on one foot, I pull my foot back again'. As the dreamer wakens, he is partly trying to waken and partly trying to stay asleep. Silberer also compares awakening with dying. A recurrent dream of being born was reported to me by a patient who, as a child, in frequent nightmares found himself falling into a river from a street car as it crossed over a bridge *(58)*.

'Birth is an enormous experience', Greenacre *(33)* states, and asks: 'Is birth a chiasma, or is it a hiatus—a kind of black-out, very closely resembling death?' We do not know, of course, whether birth is all this or not. The little we may assume, however, from the study of dreams as well as from biology, is that it involves, besides other elements, something akin to an experience associated with water or a flood and frequently is so reflected in dreams and fantasies. By its very nature it has to do with something dramatic happening in relation to water, more

[4] The Anglo-Saxon root of the English word 'wake' is *wacan* which means not only to wake but also to be born. Used in a different sense ('wake of a ship') it is derived from a Norse word meaning 'wet place'.

precisely to water and motion, which in dreams is expressed either by falling into water or getting out of it. The 'psychological content' of perinatal[5] experiences, if any, suggests a combination, however amorphous and vague, of water and motion or also water in motion. The youngest subject whose 'dream' could be found in the analytic literature was reported by Hug-Hellmuth *(38)* concerning a girl a little under one year of age who had spent most of the preceding day playing and splashing in the water. During the night she was seen making splashing movements with her hands in her sleep. Despert *(15)*, who also mentions the instance just described, notes that 'Water plays an important role in children's dreams, especially in bedwetters, who frequently dream of rivers'. She reports several cases of enuretic children between the ages of three and eight whose dreams were mostly of rivers invading the room and bed and were, in Despert's words, 'dreams of drowning'.

The writer observed what is assumed to have been a water dream of a little boy, two and a half years old, whose first words on awakening in the morning, joyfully and repeatedly exclaimed, were: 'Johnie was at the waterspray, Johnie was at the waterstream. Estelle was there too.' Johnie was the dreamer's four-year-old playmate with whom he had happily played near a drinking fountain on several recent visits to a playground. During the three days prior to the dream, the child had had to be kept at home because of an acute tonsillitis. On the day preceding the dream he had asked several times to be taken to the playground, but had been refused. In the manner described by Freud about the dreams of children, he had directly converted the frustration into its fulfilment. There was no bedwetting. Of special interest were the names he included in it. Johnie was the name not only of the dreamer's playmate, but also of the subject's father (John). Estelle was the nurse who had taken care of the little boy's eight-months-old brother throughout the

[5] The term, perinatal, as used here, encompasses natal, neonatal, immediately postnatal, and early oral connotations relating to the infant during the first two or three months of life.

latter's first six weeks of life. This nurse had recently been seen again and recognized by the dreamer in the same playground where he had seen her holding another infant in her arms and where he had been playing with Johnie. The dream thus contained unmistakable references to birth, nursing, and the arrival of a brother; also to the brother's potential replacement by another child, the playmate Johnie, who at will could be made absent (unborn, dead) as proved by the three days of illness and absence preceding the dream. Possibly the fountain itself whose stream the young dreamer had just learned to turn on and off at will represented also the fulfilment of this wish, the undoing of the brother's birth.

It is suggested that a river in dreams associated with fantasies of birth represents a condensation of kinesthetic sensations and stimulations experienced by the breaking of the waters during birth and later fused with other early 'watery' experiences in the infant's life. The symbol, river, with its connotations of flowing water, motion, breaking forth, flood, current, and the actively propelling force of masses of fluid seems to correspond to a pictorial, condensed, and manifest representation of the repressed unconscious and perceptual material that goes into the formation of symbols. Water is not the only substance that becomes unconsciously associated with being born from a fluid medium. Later unconscious substitutions of milk, saliva, urine, blood, and semen become interchangeable. Tears also belong in this category. A German love song begins: 'Put your cheek to my check, then our tears will flow together . . .'.

This interchangeability of fluids is exemplified in the following episode. A boy, a little over two years old, asked his mother for some milk one night. He was given some, but told by his mother that there was very little left and that more would be bought in the store the next morning. The child awoke the next morning much earlier than usual and began to play his record player—his favorite activity upon awakening. First he played quietly several of his many records, but soon he started to cry violently and unhappily because he could not find his

'rain record'. In tears, he asked urgently to be given this rain record, a children's record with an umbrella pictured on it, with a theme about 'singing in the rain'. When the record was found and given to him, he calmed down a little and played it a few times. After a while, he turned to his father with renewed distress and said anxiously: 'Milk all gone, all gone the milk, Daddy has to get milk from the store'. When he was shown several bottles of milk which, unknown to him, had meanwhile been provided, he became calm.

Helene Deutsch *(16)* reports the dream of a woman who found herself in a dark cellar being pursued by a woman. In this dream the patient was seized by frightful dread because she could find no escape from the cellar. Suddenly she noticed that blood was flowing from a hole in her head. An ambulance arrived, took her away, and she was saved. 'Her associations', says Deutsch, 'showed beyond a shadow of a doubt that this was a representation of the patient's own birth'. The element of darkness is present in many dreams of this type. Abraham *(3)* has mentioned it as a symbol of the womb. Freud *(26)* reported the dream of a female patient: at a holiday resort on a lake she flings herself into the dark water at a place where the pale moon is reflected in the water. He states, 'Dreams of this sort are parturition dreams'.

Of clinical interest are two references to the river Elbe in the Schreber Memoirs *(52)*, hitherto not mentioned in the literature. In the first passage Schreber describes a marked deterioration of his condition.

> The month of November, 1895 marks an important time in the history of my life and in particular in my own ideas of the possible shape of my future. I remember the period distinctly; it coincided with a number of beautiful autumn days when there was a heavy morning mist on the Elbe. During that time the signs of transformation into a woman became so marked on my body that I could no longer ignore the imminent goal at which the whole development was aiming. . . . I myself received the impression of a female body, first on my arms and hands, later on my legs, bosom, buttocks, and other parts of my body.

In the second passsage Schreber indicates his feelings when bathing in the Elbe.

> Remarkable things also happened when since the beginning of this month I started to bathe in the Elbe. . . . Yesterday while bathing in the open Elbe miracles increased tremendously my rate of breathing and caused my whole body to shiver, as soon as I sat on a floating log . . . peculiar feelings must arise in a human being who expects a miracle to be enacted against him at any moment while swimming in deep water, making it difficult for him to move.

This passage is added by Schreber as an explanatory footnote to a detailed discussion of the question, 'Where do I come from?', which fills several paragraphs in his memoirs preceding the quoted lines. Macalpine and Hunter *(52)* have pointed to the essential topic of birth and procreation in Schreber's recurrent preoccupations, without, however, taking note of his mentioning the river Elbe in this connection. The river, then, appears in Schreber's memoirs (a) when he observes signs of becoming transformed into a female, that is, capable of giving birth to a child; (b) when he is concerned with fantasies of birth and procreation as evidenced by his mentioning in the same context Christmas, nativity, celestial bodies, miracles[6] and their influence on his rate of breathing and other body sensations (shivering), thus possibly referring to the experience of his own birth.

Much of what was said before concerning birth as reflected in dreams is contained in the following dream reported by Ella Freeman Sharpe *(67)*: 'I was in a room and suddenly the door opened and a great flood of water came in'. The analyst was at first inclined to consider this dream as the evidence of an 'accident'; 'But', she adds, 'it is the one dream that I am bold enough to quote as possibly embodying also a birth experience. It was

[6] Miracles, in Schreber's terminology, refer to procreation. Whenever he speaks of his fantasies about 'fleetingly made little men' and procreation fantasies, he usually adds that they were 'miracled up', that is, born. This also refers to anal birth in Schreber's system. In another passage he defines 'to create' as 'to produce miracles'.

ascertained that the patient's birth was heralded by an unexpected sudden bursting of the waters. The fact was unknown to the patient at the time of the dream.'

Further aspects of river symbolism can be found in another dream reported by Sharpe *(67)*.

> Wake up, wake up, wake up. This is the River Moldau. Here King Wenceslas lived and this is the cherry tree that grew in Charles Dickens's garden.

In her associations the patient remembered that she was swinging in a cherry tree when she was told that she had a new baby sister. This memory was fused together with memories of being awakened to pass water and to the joyous awakening on Christmas morning to find Christmas presents. The patient remembered the story of King Wenceslas as one in which a king went on a journey taking gifts to the poor. She spoke of Charles Dickens's Christmas Carol, in which a miser had a change of heart and gave generously to the needy. She also went into further details about the Christmas story. Deeper lying urethral fantasies and bodily experiences were indicated, as the analyst remarks, that related to the symbol of the river Moldau. The word made the patient think successively of mold, iron mold, and the stain left on a mattress when urine has soaked into it.

Among the aspects of birth which this dream reveals are the awakening, (as in Silberer's examples), the Christmas story, (as in Schreber's nativity fantasies), and especially the associations connected with the river Moldau, namely mold, iron mold, and urinary stain. The bodily experiences indicated by the choice of the name of the river as well as the specific associations to this name appear to suggest certain sensations of a kinesthetic nature—changes of mold (shape) and pressure (iron) connected with a 'river' experience (water, birth) which becomes attached, characteristically, to a later 'river' experience of a different kind (urination). Of interest is the extraordinary condensation implied in the symbol. The Moldau dream apparently refers both to the sister's birth and to the patient's own birth.

There is another aspect of river symbolism in this dream to

which Lewin *(49)* has called attention. 'A river in the manifest dream text', he states, 'often stands for a sister'. He credits Zilboorg with this finding. The symbolic equation of river with sister is of clinical significance. This equation, for instance, makes more understandable the intense anxieties often accompanying river dreams, certain types of agoraphobia, bridge phobia, and others. Sibling rivalry concealed behind the façade of a pleasant river scene; sexual curiosity and scoptophilia also are features sometimes of such dreams.

A patient related in one of his first analytic sessions a puberty experience—when he tried to observe from a hideout in their room his sister and her girl friend in the act of undressing—in the following words: '. . . it was a resort place, and there was a small body of water near-by, perhaps a creek or an artificial pool. I would occasionally swim in it. . . .' In many subsequent sessions this patient spoke with such regularity of lakes, beaches, creeks, and pools, whenever he mentioned his sister, that I became certain that some reference to the latter would occur when a water term appeared in his associations. Though no interpretation was given by me, this was invariably the case.

A famous example is the dream of little Hans. Freud *(28)* states that the boy had this dream when he was three and three quarters years of age. It occurred some time after the birth of his sister and was apparently the first dream reported by the child. He dreamed: 'Today when I was asleep I thought I was at Gmunden with Mariedl'. There is no need to go into the analytic details of this dream which were described by Freud and can be found in his paper. I merely wish to mention as an additional circumstance that the dream of little Hans presumably was a river dream. I was able to reconstruct this fact by examining the local map of the town of Gmunden, the place of the little boy's dream. Freud emphasizes that Hans was at Gmunden through the whole summer and used to run about 'all day long' with the landlord's children, including Mariedl. It is most unlikely that the river and lake there could have remained unobserved by the alert little boy.

Gmunden is, as its name implies, located at the mouth of a

river named Traun[7] which empties into Traun Lake. Viewed psychoanalytically, Gmunden is the place where the Traun River (sister) fuses with the Traun Lake (mother). It is also the 'mouth' (*Mund*) through which the sister was possibly conceived according to the oral impregnation fantasies of little children. Finally, it is the place where Hans, at his age on the verge of turning into a little Œdipus, desires to fuse himself with his mother and to empty his own 'stream' into her. To illustrate this last point further, I adduce as another example Abraham's *(2)* four-year-old boy who urinated into the sea. Abraham tells us that the boy urinating into the water tried to give the impression that the whole sea was his own production. He took particular pleasure '. . . in passing water whenever a wave approached him'. Abraham interpreted this as a narcissistic aggrandizement of the boy's phallic prowess, which it undoubtedly is. I believe that the urinary stream directed by the little boy on and into the sea whenever a wave approached, is at the same time a gratification of the genital libido of the four-year-old boy who, stimulated by the flowing waves, symbolically acts out his libidinal wishes toward the mother with the closest symbolic mother substitute available, the sea.

A young man who entered analysis because of an exhibitionistic compulsion, which impelled him to masturbate in the presence of little girls, reported as one of his early memories that at the age of three or four he would sit at the beach near the edge of the water, next to his mother, and would shout to the onrushing sea waves, 'come on, come on!' He remembered the pleasurable sensations in his genitals produced by the rhythmic impact of the onrushing waves. In puberty he directed the stream of the bathroom shower toward his genitals in order to experience the same pleasure. At that time he would also often sit close to his female cousin, surreptitiously arranging that her bare feet rub

[7] The name Traun, sounding in German very much like *Traum* (dream), is derived from the Gothic *drunjus* (sound, roar) which is the German *dröhnen*. One of the four rivers of paradise, *Gihon* (roar), has the same meaning. The primal scene connotations are here suggestive.

against his genital area, and would wish to urinate on her. I have described elsewhere *(58)* how a female cousin is the equivalent of a sister, once removed, as it were.

To return to the dream of little Hans, many of the young dreamer's conflicts, the arrival of his sister, the fantasies about his mother's pregnancy, the riddle of where babies come from, the fear of being attacked orally, perhaps even his later street phobia, in which street is equated with river and sister, can be found in a highly condensed fashion in this dream about the river-lake town Gmunden. It is noteworthy that Freud in his postscript to this paper (1922) adds that when he saw little Hans again, 'now a strapping youth of nineteen', the young man told him to his astonishment that he could remember nothing of the story nor could he recognize himself in it. The only thing, however, that he could vaguely remember was the sojourn in Gmunden.

Friedman *(30)* has observed that dreams of bridges occur at crucial periods in analysis and are especially rich in analytically valuable material. I have found the same to be true with dreams of rivers which, on the whole, seem to be infrequently noted in analyses. When, however, the river symbol does appear in a dream, deeply repressed material often becomes accessible and the analysis of very early, hitherto inaccessible experiences may become possible.

A middle-aged, professional man, well advanced in his analysis, dreamt of the Hudson River as it flows past the city of Newburgh-on-the-Hudson. Near Newburgh the Hudson receives a small tributary which 'attaches itself to the stream in a circular fashion', the patient said, 'like a bent arm, or a side branch'. The dream produced a veritable *flood* of associations of early childhood memories over several analytic hours. The patient was born and lived his first six years in a little European town which reminded him of Newburgh. Of all the cities in New York State he likes Newburgh best and often visits it. He usually travels by car or bus, but for his trips to Newburgh on week-ends or holidays he likes to take the Hudson River boat. He remembers

a small river in his home town. 'It really was a creek', he explained, 'and it was a minor tributary to another river which emptied into the sea. My mother took me along to the river bank. She and other women would bathe in the river. When she dived into the water, I was terribly afraid because she disappeared under the surface of the water and for some time I would not see her head in the river. I would scream out loud, and the tears would stream down from my eyes.'

The patient then spoke of his little sister, born when he was aged about one and a half, and who died of a pulmonary disease a year later. With intense emotion he described the coughing spells she had had and how his mother and father would carry the sick child 'on their bent arms' through the apartment, holding her up so that she might get some air. For want of air she often became blue in the face. He also remembers how his mother would hold her at her breast, support her with her bent arms, and nurse her. The patient recalls some details of the funeral and the child's grave in the cemetery. These memories were confirmed by the patient's living parent. The patient left his home town with his family at the age of six and a half and never returned. During his school years he became an ardent lover of geography and wanted to become an explorer. His main interest was directed to following the courses of rivers through all the tributaries, river-bends, valleys, and mountains back to their origin. He wanted to know where every river came from and where it went. Throughout puberty he aspired to explore the course of the Amazon River as well as the sources of the Nile. 'The Nile has two sources', he said, 'one of which is called the Blue Nile. Why is it named Blue?' At this point he remembered his sister's cyanotic appearance when she suffered from her paroxysms of cough. In another analytic session he vividly recalled certain circumstances which were connected with the sister's birth and which will be discussed later in this paper. By profession the patient was a biochemist who for years did research on the chemical properties and secretion of body fluids.

It became apparent that the Hudson River in the dream rep-

resented the mother, and that the smaller stream represented the sister attached to the mother in a fashion similar to the arm-supported position of the nursing infant. The two rivers also represented the mother's breasts. The mighty Hudson referred as well to the patient's father who, according to the description, was a powerfully built yet maternally minded person who often carried the sick child as well as the patient in his arms. The dream, then, contains a condensation of significant data about the patient's earliest traumatic experiences: the arrival of his sister, nursing, sibling rivalry, the early relation of mother and child, the sister's illness and death. From historical data it transpired that the patient, unlike his younger sister, had been bottle-fed because his mother had fallen ill shortly after his birth and had to be hospitalized for some time. The patient, who consciously resented his mother throughout his life, was unconsciously fascinated by her, compared her with Lorelei, the siren of the Rhine, and yearned for her 'river bed' and arms.

Another male patient, almost two years in analysis, dreamed he was looking for a new apartment located 'near the river'. In his associations he spoke of a girl whom he knew and who had an apartment not far from the river. 'This is the only girl I have wanted to be close to in recent years', he said, 'but I am afraid of her. I would like to go to her apartment and stay there over the week-end, yet she then will expect me to sleep with her, and I cannot do that.' The patient is an overt homosexual, has never had sexual intercourse with women, but likes to be invited by them to their homes and to be taken care of by them 'in a motherly way', as he puts it,—fed, sheltered, and cared for. The girl who has the apartment near the river reminds him of his youngest sister who is closest to him in age and with whom he had 'the only boy-girl relationship' he ever had. He grew up in a household which was overloaded with females (mother and four elder sisters). The dream also reminds him of a time he spent in Paris when he used to walk near the Seine. He would observe young couples sitting and kissing on the benches near the river. Other men also watched these lovers, and one of the

men once said to him, 'It's funnier watching these young lovers than going to the movies'. But he felt excluded and unhappy about being an outsider. This he had felt throughout his life. As a little boy he felt rejected by his sisters, who would not allow him to play with them or to take part in their activities. He was the youngest child and always looked up to his sisters for help and support. In fact, although thirty years old and employed, he still managed to get substantial material support from his eldest sister.

A typical example of a dream about crossing a river yielded much information about the dreamer's œdipal longings and anxieties, and ultimately proved a turning point in the patient's analysis. The dreamer was a thirty-four-year-old artist who had suffered from a severe washing compulsion and germ phobia for many years. After several analytic sessions in which he had expressed numerous fantasies about birth and rebirth, the patient had a dream in which he was trying to cross a river. He was not sure whether he actually crossed the river or stayed behind. In the dream it seemed to him that he did both. There was considerable anxiety with the dream.

In his associations the patient spoke of the St. Lawrence River where he spent his childhood and adolescence. His mother, wanting him and his sister, four years his senior, to learn to play the banjo, had sent the children to a teacher whose house was near the river. The teacher was a Negro who lived with his white wife and several children in a cottage. The patient felt that there was 'something sexual' and 'highly embarrassing' in this domestic relationship. He also felt that there was 'something sexual' about playing music with his sister and 'making beautiful music together'. Although he did not like to play the banjo, the instrument nevertheless fascinated him. He wanted to 'explore its construction' and to find out everything about its 'inside build and functioning'. Many times therefore he took the instrument apart and put it together again. 'We learned to play music on the thing', he said, 'love songs and current popular hits. As we had only one instrument we would play them al-

ternately on the same banjo.' The patient then spoke of his sister's subsequent marriage and moving with her husband to another section of the city located 'across the river', where he often visited them. To do this he had to cross an old rickety bridge which swayed in the wind. It had cracks in its floor, and he was afraid to walk across. One night, when he wanted to visit his sister, he found the bridge had been closed for repairs. Since he wanted to be with his sister at all costs—'nothing in the world could have stopped me that night', he exclaimed—he made his way across the closed bridge. When he had reached the middle of the construction, he saw a man near the scaffolding. Perhaps it was a workman. The patient became terrified and was sure he would be attacked or killed. He ran across the bridge in panic and reached his sister's house stricken with terror.

Apart from the meaning of these events, it was interesting to note the manner in which the patient related them. When he recalled learning to play music with his sister near the river, he spoke warmly and tenderly. When he came to the episode about the stranger on the bridge, his voice became shaky, he was blocked repeatedly, and was obviously in great fear. This was all the more noteworthy because the patient suffered from a severe obsessive-compulsive neurosis and up to that time had hardly shown any emotion in his analysis, had never raised his voice or altered his tone. He had been five years of age, at the height of the œdipus complex, when his father, a carpenter, had died. He grew up with his mother and older sister about whom he had many thinly veiled incestuous fantasies. Throughout puberty he masturbated with his sister's underwear. He was afraid that his sperm would go into his mother's and sister's 'crevices', (cf. my earlier remarks on 'crevice' and 'creek'), and impregnate them. To counteract these dangers he had to resort to increasingly vigorous measures of cleansing and disinfection, using copious amounts of water, soap, and alcohol, and finally resorting to complex and compulsive washing rituals which he repeated up to eighty or more times daily. The nocturnal encounter on his way across the river to visit his sister, be it fact

or fantasy, has all the characteristics of meeting the dreaded river demon and mysterious avenger that figures in so many ancient river myths. The patient also had many dreams about ghosts and monsters by which he felt threatened. They ultimately represented his dead father whose vengeance he feared. In the transference I was the dangerous avenger who would punish him for crossing the river, that is, for going to his sister with sexual desires. The stranger at the scaffold on the bridge is recognizable as the father who was a carpenter.

A twenty-year-old college girl, in analysis for a little over a year, dreamed of a long, winding river in which she was swimming with her boy friend. The water of the river was slimy or muddy. The river could have been a lake, she added, as an afterthought. The long, winding river she first thinks of as a dark passage, then as of her genitals, and with the slimy water as of her friend's seminal fluid which makes her feel slimy and dirty. She speaks of a lake where she spent her week-ends with her friend in great secrecy in a cabin. There they did 'dirty' things together. Telling them to me, she felt would make me think of her as dirty, too. One of these dirty things was her friend's kissing and sucking her genitals. She did not really like this, and in order to be sexually stimulated she fantasied during the procedure that she was her friend's sister. Were she his sister, her sexual activities with him, she said, would be incestuous and taboo. The thought of this excited her. Her friend had a sister, and recently had told her about his strong erotic attachment to his sister and mother. She wanted to know more about it, but he refused to tell her more, despite her repeated and excited questioning. 'There must have been more between him and his sister', she continued, 'perhaps also something between him and his mother'. She felt jealous of his sister. She then recalled various trips she had taken to a mountain stream in her early teens. She went there with her parents and an elderly gentleman, a friend of her father. On her frequent walks with her father and this man along the banks of the river she felt sexually excited

and fantasied that her father's friend became sexually attracted to her and would secretly make approaches to her. That this did not occur disappointed her.

The patient herself was the muddy river, thinking of herself as her friend's sister and engaging in sexual activities with him as her fantasied brother. These desires were directed toward her father and, in the transference, toward the analyst thinly disguised as the 'elderly gentleman'. Interesting also is the patient's afterthought that it could have been a lake she dreamt about, and not a river. In her associations she mentioned a lake. Her friend had told her of his desires for both his sister and his mother. In her dream this became a river-lake as a condensed expression of her sexual wishes and rivalry on two levels: with her boy friend she takes his sister's place (as a river); with her father she takes her mother's place (as a lake). The fact that she was swimming with her friend in the dream indicates the sexual nature of her wishes unmistakably.

A schizophrenic female patient in her mid-twenties dreamt about walking toward the East River where a crime is going to be committed, perhaps a murder. With the East River she associated eating as well as the town of Eaton where her mother lives. She hates her mother. 'I hate every inch of her', she said. 'I could kill her. My mother is treacherous, just like the East River.'

This patient was an only child who lived with her fairly young mother in a sort of sister relationship. The patient herself characterizes her mother as an older sister whom she envies because she looks better, dresses better, and is married to the patient's father. At bedtime, the patient goes through a series of rituals, one of which consists of eating two or more pears; otherwise she cannot fall asleep. She speaks of these pears as 'mother-food', which also includes cake, biscuits, crackers, candies, ice-cream. Most of all she likes pears of a special kind: they must be large and round, neither too soft in consistency nor sweet in taste. 'They must be just right', she said, 'they must be of the shape and consistency of, yes, of the breast'.

This brings us to the oral aspects of river symbolism. So much has been said about its obvious urethral aspects that its oral connotations perhaps have been to some extent overlooked. The stream of milk from the flowing breast is also a river, as is the infant's later reaction of salivation to it. In suckling, the mother's milk mingles with the baby's saliva much in the same way as the water of the Traun Lake merges with the water of the Traun River at the zone of confluence, the river mouth. In some children after full functioning of the salivary glands[8] has set in, the 'salivary river' is sufficiently copious in the form of constant drooling that substantial amounts of fluid are excreted in this manner. This oral stream daily produced by the child may have narcissistic connotations similar to those of the urinary flow. Abraham reports a girl of four years who called her saliva 'beautiful clean tongue water'. Ferenczi mentions a boy, aged about one and a half, who exclaimed when he was first shown the Danube: 'What a lot of spit!'

Among the theories of impregnation and birth of little children, mentioned by Freud *(27)*, is the fantasy that 'one urinates before the other', or 'the man urinates into the woman's chamber' to make her pregnant. But there is another infantile theory that prominently refers to the oral zone in bluntly asserting 'that one gets a child by a kiss'. This well-known fantasy of oral impregnation apparently concerns fantasies of saliva, and the confluence of the salivary 'rivers' of two kissing people at the zone of contact, the mouth. Certain terms like 'soul kiss' and the German *Zungenkuss* describe graphically this intimate fusion. Eissler *(18)* mentions the ancient Greek myth that man was created from the blood of the Titans. This is reminiscent of the fantasy of a fourteen-year-old girl observed by Freud *(27)* to whom being married signified 'mixing blood'. It may be further extended to the idea of mixing intimate fluids, orally and otherwise, thus coming closer to a variety of infantile fantasies of impregnation.

[8] A mother of a seven-months-old infant remarked about its drooling: 'Whenever I hold my baby, I always think it's raining'.

Such infantile notions of mixing and fusing fluids orally lead us to a further consideration of those drives, libidinal and aggressive, that Lewin *(47)* has grouped together as the oral triad: to eat, to be eaten, and to sleep. Since the nursling's eating is actually a sucking intake of fluid only, there can, strictly speaking, be no eating nor being eaten at this stage. There can only be drinking and being drunk (or drowned) during the first months of infancy. This relation is perhaps better expressed in German, which allows the use of the same verb form transitively and intransitively: *trinken* and *ertrinken* (drink and drown). The Anglo-Saxon word *druncian,* which is the root of both drunken and drown, also indicates this ancient connection. Other expressions such as 'dropping off to sleep', and 'falling asleep', the German *schlaftrunken* and *einschlafen,* the English 'groggy' (from the noun, grog, a drink), and the originally Scandinavian *doze* which is akin to 'dizzy' in English and to *dösig* (sleepy) in German dialect, further illustrate the connections between sleep and vague bodily sensations expressed in terms that are aquatic or suggest floating, falling, or being immersed. Similar sensations are experienced in dreams and hypnagogic phenomena of falling into water, sinking into soft or jellied masses, drowning in swamps or junglelike areas, falling into chasms, submerging in crowds or crowded places, and the like. If we look at the oral triad from the point of view of earliest infancy, when sleeping, drinking, and being drunk (or drowned) predominate, and at the same time remember that drowning is equivalent to being born, in the unconscious, the underlying perinatal connotations of the oral triad become perhaps more fully apparent.

From Lewin's studies of the dream screen, especially those presented in his later papers *(49, 50),* we learn that '. . . the dormescent visual impression of the breast . . . becomes the screen onto which visual dreams are projected. . . . Simple dreams (in the sense of lacking manifest detail) reproduce one or another of the moments of falling asleep at the breast, and they contain visual and nonvisual Isakower phenomena. Especially in dreams, later experiences may combine with the oral experiences, and

by such combination and blending alter the form and content of the original experience so that, for example, the dream screen itself may take on details not derived from nursing but from later observations.'

Elaborating this idea further and pushing our inquiry yet another stage back, the question arises whether sensations of this type, while taking on details from later perceptions, do not also contain earlier elements derived from historically older experiences, thus undergoing further modification under the influence of the ontogenetically earliest events of infancy. Ascribing, in accordance with Lewin, the visual and perhaps also tactile-thermal sensory impressions of an approaching, globelike mass and similar sensations to infantile experiences of the breast, I wish to draw attention to the group of much less defined and less definable, because formless, phenomena: to the elusive, fluid or foggy, milky or darkish, or otherwise vague and opaque sensations that also are part of the Isakower phenomena; to the 'oceanic feeling' which, resting on the imperfect separation of breast and ego, characteristically has to do with water and floating; and, especially, to those nebulous, amorphous, and inconcrete states or feelings in which, in Lewin's words, 'the whole dreamer may be immersed[9] in the substance of the dream or its screen equivalent'. I am inclined to regard this poorly defined set of formless, mostly fluid or semifluid phenomena as the result of a fusion of infantile experiences of the breast with psychic elements belonging to the earliest (perinatal) infantile stage.[10] I arrived at this view not only because of the water symbolism which is such an integral part of these dreams and states of feeling (including sinking into soft masses, falling, and floating),

[9] The frequent use of such 'aquatic' terms in analytic writings treating the subject of orality is noteworthy itself: Lewin *(50)* speaks of 'immersed', Arlow *(4)* about 'floating off to sleep', Friedman *(29)* of the 'bottomless well of orality'.

[10] Further studies along these lines may perhaps result in differentiating more fully such a perinatal phase from the oral stage of development proper or in establishing it as the earliest subphase within the wider framework of orality. Such studies may also add to our understanding of narcissism. In the Greek myth Narcissus sees himself reflected in *water*.

but also on the basis of other observations, with particular reference to drowning. It is noteworthy that dreams of drowning are frequently observed in severe alcoholics, i.e., in patients to whom *trinken-ertrinken* most directly applies.

A man reported in analysis that the night before, just as he was about to fall asleep, he had suddenly remembered a near-drowning experience in a lake near a summer resort at the age of twelve. The memory (which had emerged after he had talked a good deal about water, body fluids, and vague sensations of 'dissolving' during the preceding analytic session) had 'a paralyzing quality', he said, 'and left me shaky'. That night he had a dream in which he lectured before an audience about female anatomy. A woman, the president of the local Parent-Teachers Association, was lying on a table; he explained to the audience the anatomy of the female genitals, pointing to the various parts such as pubes, clitoris, etc., on the naked female body. While doing this, he suddenly noticed that a great amount of water was bursting forth from the woman's genitals. With the woman in the dream the patient, a science teacher, associated his mother and with her genitals the lake in which he had almost drowned. During the session he also remembered an episode in puberty which he spoke of as 'sleep walking' to his mother's bedroom. 'When I woke up I found myself at mother's bed', he said and continued: 'A bathtub full of water is also like a lake or an ocean'; he then mentioned his fear of being swept down the drain pipe of the tub, a fear he had repeatedly alluded to on other occasions.

Schreber, at the height of his illness, had thoughts of being drowned. He writes: 'Every bath I took was connected with ideas of drowning . . . the purpose (of "holy baths") was to give me opportunity of drowning myself. I nearly always entered the bath inwardly afraid that its purpose was to end my life. The inner voices . . . made me repeatedly attempt to put my head under the water.' Schreber thus wished to be drowned, and not to be eaten. Characteristically, this whole passage about drowning, in Schreber's Memoirs, appears in direct connection with

his discussion of feeding, forced feeding, refusal of food, and administration of food at the mental hospital. It may thus be presumed that, in Schreber's unconscious, drowning and oral events were connected in the manner postulated above, the fear (or wish) of drowning representing the perinatal component of his fantasies.

After the birth of his sister, little Hans vehemently protested against taking a bath. He had to be given his bath kneeling or standing; when sitting or lying in it, he was afraid of drowning. The college girl who dreamt about a riverlike lake also had several dreams of 'being in the river' and was consciously afraid of being drowned by huge tidal waves. In one of her dreams her mother spilled water over her and on the floor. With this she associated the birth of her brother, three years her junior. Accusing her mother of being inconsiderate and stingy, she equated drowning and spilling water with being born, violently hating her mother for having given birth to her as a female.

One patient mentioned by Lewin *(50)* would ask outright, 'Is it raining?'—when relating an experience of the dream screen. Another felt as if he were 'looking through a window into some milky substance'. In the dreams of several of Lewin's patients occurred 'an interesting variant of the wall as screen . . . the blackboard', and one of them recalled the dream screen at first only as 'a blackboard'. From his associations, it became clear that the black background represented the dark inside of a woman as well as the act of sleeping at her breast. While Lewin seems to regard these examples as admixtures of 'later fantasies of going to sleep within the mother's belly', I wonder whether we may not link them ontogenetically with older experiences and see in them a fusion of earliest perinatal with later visual experiences of the breast. I refer here again to the dream of 'dark water' reported by Freud 'where the pale moon is reflected in the water'. It seems to me that this dream, in which the image of the moon (breast) is fused with the dark water (birth), represents an example of such a fusion. Freud, in his interpretation, further clarifies this relation of birth and breast. He arrives at

the symbolic equation of moon with buttocks (or breasts) via the meaning of the French *lune,* moon, (bottom) and points to the anatomical role of the latter in the process of birth. Also, the dream of the 'dark cellar' described by Helene Deutsch seems to belong to this group. Garma's *(31)* analysand who dreamed about a white meteor ready to explode directly associated abortion and childbirth with the exploding of the meteor.

A young woman patient of European extraction had typical Isakower phenomena throughout her childhood and adolescence. When she was falling asleep, a shadowy, globelike, darkish mass would come nearer and nearer, assume giant proportions and threaten to crush her. Whenever the patient described these experiences in analysis, she also spoke of dark whirlpools and of the flowing waters of the Danube in which she might drown. 'These whirlpools are treacherous', she reported in another session which took place on her birthday, 'as bad and dangerous as my mother was'. At this point she became depressed and said that she felt like crying. She spoke of her mother's love for her younger brother, 'because he was born a boy. I feel empty. I was born a girl . . . a birthday is dangerous, too.' Several weeks later the patient spoke again of a large mass approaching and threatening her. This time she visualized it as a large amœba enveloping and incorporating her, and, still describing how helpless and anxious she felt, she suddenly had the impression that 'it now looks like a dark cloud' hanging over her and immediately associated to it the Biblical Flood, which she called 'Noah's Flood'. Earlier in the session she had mentioned infantile fantasies about her father's Zeus-like greatness and omnipotence (her father had been a prominent scholar) and had said: 'Father can do everything. Father can give birth. He is male and female all at once. He gave birth to me, just as Zeus did to Pallas Athene, from his head.' With the help of the Zeus-Athene fantasy this patient, who suffered from an unusually severe female castration complex, denied that she was 'water-born', that is, as a woman by a woman. She felt that she was 'head-born', that is, from her father's cerebrum.

It is well to remember that it is not the breast as such to which the oral triad refers, but rather the feeding, flowing, milk-producing breast. What Lewin has called 'the oral world' must by necessity have an affinity to the liquid world of natal and perinatal life. The breast, by virtue of its fluid-giving function, can become fused in the unconscious with both earlier (natal) 'flood' experiences and later infantile breast sensations of a more formed (visual-tactile-thermal) type. A highly condensed dream of 'being in the river' reported by Róheim *(66)* suggests a combination of birth, breast, urethral, and genital fantasies, as indicated by the choice of the symbol *river* in the dream. To this category probably belong the awakening dreams of which some examples were given earlier. They have been almost universally ascribed to vesical sensations and have thus been interpreted mostly as urethral dreams. But it is obvious that they must have a latent oral content too. Vesical sensations, leading to awakening, rightfully belong to a later stage when sphincter control is at least partially established. The infant in the early months of life does not awaken from sound sleep because of urinary needs, but because of oral ones. He awakens, often with a sudden, piercing cry, because he is thirsty or hungry. The oral awakening is historically older than the urethral awakening. The famous 'French Governess Dream' communicated by Ferenczi to Freud, with its graphic humorous depiction of a urethral awakening dream (brook-river-lake-ocean), shows only the later, urethral constituents of the process of awakening, not its deepest oral and possibly also natal components. It is true that the idea of flowing water is closely allied to that of secretion, particularly of urine. But equally close, if not more so, is its association with the intake of and contact with fluid.

It seems to me that to this earliest substratum of the oral triad ultimately belongs also the classic fantasy of the *Weltuntergangserlebnis* which can be observed in such deeply regressive states as Schreber's psychosis, and which has been erroneously rendered 'world destruction fantasy' in English. Literally and, as I see it, significantly, Schreber does not speak of the destruc-

tion of the world in general. He mentions a definite mode in which the world is coming to an end by 'going under' or drowning. Thus, strictly speaking, the world does not break down, as Fenichel *(19)* and others have it. It goes under. That this is the real meaning of *Weltuntergang* is emphasized by Schreber. In his repeated references to world catastrophes, he speaks of the Biblical Deluge, the story of Noah, and the Greek legend of the deluge which only Deucalion and Pyrrha survived. All the early myths about a great flood that destroys the world, including the legend of the lost continent, Atlantis, have this in common: the world goes under and is drowned by the onrushing and overflowing waters unleashed upon the earth. This universal myth has been analytically interpreted as a urethral fantasy. I believe that we must add to this the oral fantasy of being drowned (in Lewin's terminology, devoured) by the stream of the flowing breast, as well as by the ontogenetically oldest flood that bursts from the amniotic membrane during birth. This single dramatic event precedes the infant's oral contact with the breast at most by a day or two, and may therefore become fused in the unconscious with all later fluid experiences: oral, urethral, anal, and genital.

Since death has no representation in the unconscious, this fantasy of 'going under' perhaps comes closest to the idea of death and its denial. The sun goes under, but rises again. In many religious beliefs, as soon as death comes to an individual 'here', a new life begins for him in 'the hereafter'. Perhaps the observation of the sun sinking into the sea (the German word for sunset is *Sonnenuntergang*) and its emergence anew from it at dawn, appears to us so magnificent because this daily birth and death of the sun furnishes the 'certainty' that dying is not dying, but a birth. The denial of death implied in religious beliefs so common to all mankind finds powerful support from the observation of nature itself: sun, stars, seasons, seas, and rivers.

At the beginning of this chapter, I spoke of the universality of river symbolism embracing both birth and death, and also

mentioned the ancient view of the ocean as an all-encircling, infinite river. The 'underworld' as the abode of the dead, 'the other shore' from which no mortal returns, the rivers Lethe and Styx, Acheron and Cocytus, which flow through the 'underworld', the way to which leads over the edge of the earth across the oceanic stream, are all related to going down, going under, being submerged in the aquatic realm. Burial customs, including river burials (Attila, Alaric), cremation and funeral pyres, may be part of this symbolism, as in the unconscious, earth, fire, and water are interchangeable, and ultimately represent both birth and death. This is perhaps also the reason why birth and rebirth, being born and dying, are unconsciously inseparable. One great symbolic link, water, or more precisely, flowing water, connects them throughout human existence. The fantasy of *Weltuntergang*, coming closest to the idea of death, seems also closest to the idea of birth, rebirth, and eternal life.

MYTHOLOGY, HISTORY, AND GEOGRAPHY

All civilization originally was a river civilization, and there is reason to believe that precivilization also developed along the banks of rivers. Streams provided water for human beings and animals, fertile land in the valleys, relatively easy transportation, and avenues for exploration. Neanderthal Man and Heidelberg Man were river dwellers. Most cave drawings of prehistoric man were found in the valley of the Vezère River; permanent human encampments during the mesolithic age existed near riverbanks, beaches, and lake shores. To go still further back, the fossils of Pithecanthropus were excavated along the bank of the Solo River.

Turning to the great river civilizations in recorded history which center around the Nile, Mesopotamia—the land of the twin rivers—the Indus, Brahmaputra, etc., we find documents of river symbolism in great number. To mention only a few: the Gilgamesh epos and the Biblical flood story modeled on it; the Isis-Osiris myth; the ceremonials accompanying the fluctuations of the Nile; the Semitic water cults, and many more. From

the fact that civilization started on and around the river,—which in this sense is the mother of the civilized world[11] as we know it,—certain river features may be schematically grouped as: 1, a creative object; 2, a feeding object; 3, a healing and purifying object; 4, a libidinous and perilous object.

The first two aspects have been briefly discussed in the preceding pages in an attempt to clarify the river as a symbol of birth and breast. Flowing water as a healing and purifying agent has found ample analytic elaboration in the writings of Jones *(41, 42)*, Róheim *(65, 66)*, Bonaparte *(11)*, and other authors who have discussed the meaning of water cults, initiation rites, other religious practices such as baptism, ablutions, and the like. Related to these are fantasies about the healing powers of water in medicine,[12] legendary fountains of youth, magnetic and other magic fluids which bind all living beings together and emanate a special healing force. Franz Anton Mesmer (1734-1815), who combined these ideas into a therapeutic system,[13] received his patients in a magnificent suite in the midst of which stood a large basin of water containing sulphuric acid.

From time immemorial to the present day, streams, fountains, springs,—'the living waters' of Scriptural texts,—have been associated with magic and healing cults. Among his more than two hundred observations on the medicinal properties of water, Pliny discussed what sorts of water produce fertility, protect the embryo, cause forgetfulness, improve memory, cure love and insanity. A more recent example is the story of a boy, Joseph

[11] For Homer the 'genesis of all' is the river Oceanus, which surrounds the earth; it is closely associated with 'mother Tethys'. To Thales is attributed the notion that water is the primary substance from which all developed and which the earth rests upon. Anaxagoras held that 'rivers take their being . . . from the waters in the earth; for the earth is hollow, and has waters in its cavities'. Leonardo da Vinci, who planned to write a book on water, still believed that 'very great rivers flow underground'.

[12] It is interesting that in Germany, for example, the term *Medizin* as a remedy is popularly applied to a fluid, never to a solid substance.

[13] The word 'therapy' itself is derived from the Greek *therapia* which is believed by some authors to refer originally to a town of this name located on the Bosporus. In Homeric times streams were regarded as 'youth rearers, because the liquid gives growth' *(60)*.

Vitolo, in the Bronx section of New York City *(13)*. In 1945, the boy, eight years of age, who had attended the motion picture The Song of Bernadette, had visions in which the Virgin appeared to him on a rock for several successive evenings, ordering him to construct a chapel in her honor and announcing that a spring of miraculous power would gush forth in that place. The boy, who came from a poor Italian family, related this story to his relatives and neighbors, and soon crowds began to gather at the place, sometimes amounting to thousands of people. Among those who came were many sick people, especially paralytics, who prayed for the miracle. Recovery occurred in only one or two cases and seemed to be very doubtful. Finally, as the spring did not materialize, the boy reported that the Madonna had told him she would no longer appear. For a long time, however, people continued to flock to the place, digging in the mud and hoping to find the promised fountain.[14]

This story is reminiscent of Lourdes, of which Blanton *(10)* writes: 'The town of Lourdes in France is situated . . . *on the banks of the mountain stream Gave du Pau*. . . . On February 11, 1858, Bernadette Soubicous, a girl of fourteen . . . saw in a niche above a grotto . . . an apparition of the Virgin Mother Mary. In all she saw this apparition nineteen times. During one of these visions, she was directed *to drink and to wash her face* in a corner of the cave where she saw only mud. She dug with her hands and *uncovered a spring. . . . It was this spring which, uncovered, now flows* at the rate of thirty thousand litres of water a day and which furnishes *the water for the ceremonial baths* given to the pilgrims . . .' (italics added).

In the cult of the Virgin, reference is made to her as 'the well of mercy' throughout medieval literature. With regard to Lewin's oral triad and its implications for the understanding of clinical manifestations, a therapeutic suggestion by Thomas

[14] In the fairy tale, The Water of Life, contained in the Grimm collection, the aging sick king can be cured of his illness only by the water from a spring which the youngest son finds, with the help of a dwarf, in the underworld. With the healing water he also finds a virgin princess.

Aquinas is interesting. He recommended sleeping and bathing as remedies for depression.

The river as an object of libidinal desire has apparently always existed associated with a feeling of the unknown, the beautiful, and the mysterious, that seems closely connected with fantasies of rivers, seas, and oceans. Rivers and streams are often beautiful; but for whom is all the yearning and love, the nostalgic desire so ardently expressed in thousands of poems and songs? What is this profound and powerful appeal so often described in legends, myths, and fairy tales? The answer, of course, comes from the poets themselves. They tell us that the lure of the mysterious and unknown, of the 'dark' and the 'deep' and the sea, are basically the same—the perennial longing for the mother as well as the perils connected with it. A relatively modern poet, Algernon Charles Swinburne, expresses it

I will go back to the great sweet mother,
Mother and lover of men, the sea,
I will go down to her, I and none other,
Close with her, kiss her, and mix her with me.

An old Portuguese folk song which resembles *Die Lorelei* warns

Danger lurks for him who listens
Where the singing mermaid glistens;
Gaze not on her, gaze not on her,
Gaze not on her, fisherman!

In a Latin 'Bestiary' of the twelfth century water is called 'a pleasant wet nurse' which acts as a good mother, in contrast to 'human parents who . . . often devour their children' *(73)*. But an Egyptian papyrus contains the somber warning: 'Beware of the woman from abroad . . . look not upon her when she comes, and know her not. She is like the vortex of deep waters whose whirling is unfathomable.' A Sumerian myth, almost five thousand years old, has the old woman Nunbarshegunu instruct her daughter Ninlil how to win the love of the god Enlil *(66)*.

At the pure river, O maid, at the pure river,
Wash thyself,

O Ninlil, walk along the bank of Idnunbirdu,
The bright-eyed, the lord, the bright-eyed . . .
Enlil will see thee . . .
The bright-eyed . . . will kiss thee!

Ninlil, who follows her mother's advice, is impregnated by Enlil's 'water going into her' and conceives the moon god, Nanna. Later, Enlil takes on the form of the 'man of the river, the man-devouring river', letting his 'water go into the goddess' again. It is further noteworthy that this myth, like the Gilgamesh epos mentioned earlier, also contains the story of a great flood.

The myth of Heracles is another example. In one of these stories, the cleaning of the Augean stables by flushing them with a river, anal-urethral connotations prevail. Among other labors Heracles has to perform in the service of Erysteus, King of Argos, is one which takes him to the river Oceanus, that is, the border of the world. Here lives a monster, the son of a river nymph, which has three bodies, a famous herd of cattle, and the two-headed dog Orthis, a brother of Cerberus. 'In reading the adventures of Heracles', observes Róheim *(66)*, 'one is struck by the frequency with which he conquers someone who obstructs the passage of the traveler,—the passage to the world below or into the vagina'. As indicated elsewhere *(58)*, the angry river god or demon, in medieval stories frequently the devil, is none other than the father who does not permit the son (who in these tales usually appears as the young hero, adventurer, or explorer) to proceed unopposed on his journey of conquest. These are variations of œdipal strivings, the symbolic equation of river with sister, breast, and mother, pointing directly to the incestuous conflict in the hero's life and to the castration anxiety connected with it.

The same situation is reflected in certain languages in which a definite gender is commonly attached to the names of rivers, such as German and French, which distinguish *die Donau, die Moldau, la Seine, la Meuse,*[15] from *der Rhein, der Main, le*

[15] In some regions of Germany, incidentally, this word is used as derogatory slang for the female genital.

Rhône. In Hebrew, *nahar* (river) has both masculine and feminine genders. The corresponding Arabic *nahr* is masculine, but *mijra* meaning small river is both masculine and feminine. In Latin all river names are masculine, in English neuter. However, the specific symbolism connected with them can be found also in English, in certain popular songs, for instance, that describe the longing for the loveliness of the Swanee River as compared with the majestic virility of Old Man River, the Mississippi. Russians often refer to the Volga as 'Little Mother' and to the Don as 'Little Father'. Though the English word is neuter, its French equivalent *rivière* is feminine, their Latin root *ripa* also being feminine. The contemporary Italian poet Barolini says of the Astichello River, 'she's irresistible as a boy's first love', and of another river near Vicenza, 'she is a generous giver'.

Paul Friedman *(30)* speaks of the river as 'the water of desire'. Whenever the œdipal desire is expressed, it seems to me that the river becomes female in language as well as in feeling, thus turning into an object of strongly cathected libidinal longings and expressions. This is perhaps the reason why so many exuberant poems and love songs are directly addressed to rivers and the celebration of their beauty and romantic scenery (such as songs about *die schöne, blaue Donau*). Names like those of the river Mârne (from mater), the Virgin River in Utah, the Ilse River in Germany (of which Heine speaks as 'Princess Ilse'), and the Amazon River suggest the same connection. In such a setting the rivers are the habitat of beautiful nymphs, naïads, and other seductive females. When, on the other hand, castration fear is expressed, river names apparently assume a masculine gender in language as well as fantasy, and their threatening character is then expressed through the presence of dangerous and avenging river gods opposed to the wanderer's crossing.[16]

[16] Spuyten Duyvil, a seven-mile tidal channel which connects the Hudson River with the East River at New York, thus making an island of Manhattan, is named for the vow of a legendary Dutchman who said he would swim the creek in the dark—'in spite of the Devil'.

Here, perhaps, lies the explanation for Frazer's *(24)* angry river deities and Róheim's *(64)* dangerous demons found in numerous myths in which rivers are agents of punishment or death. The bisexual meaning of the river symbol can also be found in the traditional nicknames of the Mississippi, from the Indian 'Great Waters' to 'Ole Miss', the American 'Father of Waters' and 'Old-Big-Strong' to the French 'La Belle Rivière' which is also used for the Ohio River. The explorer Marquette called the Mississippi, Conception, the same name the Rio Grande had for some time—Rio de la Concepción. In the lore of the Mississippi there is even a story of a duel between a Creole gentleman from New Orleans and a Frenchman over the honor of the river.

A second part of this study on River Symbolism and the References will subsequently be published in This QUARTERLY.