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# INTERVIEW

## What Do Dream Animals Want of Us?

An Interview with Russell Lockhart

ROBERT S. HENDERSON

**ROBERT HENDERSON (RH):** What do you do when an animal is in your dream?

**RUSSELL LOCKHART (RL):** I'm inclined to reverse your question a bit because most often the thing that preoccupies me when a dream animal appears is what this animal *does to me*. I am aware of something that happens *spontaneously* in my experience when I dream an animal dream. I don't think I've talked or written about this before, so I'll try to articulate it here. The dream animal "calls forth" in me a *resonance*—in the re-sounding sense of that word. I think of it as a *subjectivity* linked in some way to the dream animal, yet distinct from it. I don't mean in any way that I am trying to do something to the animal image. I am not trying to enact it (say, in the Gestalt sense) or to become it (say, in the Stanislavskian sense). Nor is it in any way an act of interpretation or amplification. It is *not* something I do. This is subtle and, I believe, quite important. If I had to commit to what this might be, I'd have to say it is what Goethe meant when he talked about things not being separate objects at all, but already *belonging together*. So, in this sense, the dream animal and what it spontaneously brings forth in my experience *belong together*.

I'll try to make this clear with an example. In a recent dream, I am walking down a path and ahead of me I see a tiger, a rather large tiger. I know that everyone fears the tiger, and I sense an urge to flee from it. But I know I must go and greet the tiger and pet it as I do my cat, Samantha. With a certain trepidation, but undaunted, I do that, and the tiger rolls over on its back, and I rub its belly as I do Samantha's when she does this. The tiger extends its paw to me and I grasp it and we "shake hands." I can see that the tiger is enjoying this immensely, as am I. When I wake up, my eyes fill with tears from the utter joy of this encounter.

As I lay there “watching” the tiger from the dream, I experienced a “tiger resonance” welling up in me. It was as if there were *two* tigers—no, not *as if*—there *were* two tigers! It is not that I am *at one* with the tiger image because this *twoness* is so present. But in that Goethean sense, these two *belong together* in ways I am only beginning to fathom.

What is going on here? I know now from experience that the phenomenology of this subtleness is readily lost as soon as I go after the *meaning* of the dream, or begin an inquiry into the *symbolism* of tigers, or jump too quickly to the “tiger aspects” of my psychology or personality or potential.

So one of the first things I *do* now with animal dreams is try to stay with the *presence* of this twofold reality—in relation to this dream, for example, to stay with the *two* tigers. In dwelling with this twofold reality now with many dreams, I have come to the conclusion that these are *separate realities that desire*. That is, the dream tiger “wants” something, desires something, and I think what it may want most is another tiger in the form of an “awakened” tiger in me. I can feel this awakened tiger drawn forth from me, I can feel it in my body, a reconnection with the *animal* body, not in the form of idea, not in the form of image, but in the form of literal *presence*—perhaps a phylogenetic recapitulation or even camaraderie in some deep sense. And what does the “awakened” tiger want? What is its desire? To put it in a nutshell, what I have come to in wrestling with this question is that the animal awakened by the dream animal wants *a future*.

**RH:** But isn’t this another way of saying that the dream animal wants the dreamer to “enact it,” or “become it” as you mentioned earlier?

**RL:** The simple answer to your question is no, so let’s go into this further. First, consider what an extraordinary idea it is that a dream animal (or any other aspect of a dream) could *want, desire, or need* something from us. Can you imagine what a difference this would make in our culture? Those of us immersed in living and working with dreams forget sometimes what a miniscule part of the general populace has any relationship with dreams whatsoever—except perhaps to forget and gladly be rid of them. We are overwhelmed with what people or groups or institutions or the powers-that-be want and desire—overwhelmed! So, I’d love it if this idea of a dream animal, wanting and desiring, entered the general consciousness.

Still, I’m trying to get at something different from this idea. When we remember a dream, we are remembering a very specific “story,” however simple or complex, however coherent, bizarre, or nonsensical. The dream has a certain fixity, something akin to a *photograph*. Now consider what Roland Barthes says of the photograph: “Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe” (1981). Likewise, every dream is this catastrophe—this reality of death. This is what James Hillman developed so compellingly in *The Dream and the Underworld* (1979). While *in* the

dream, everything is very much “alive.” Most dreams disappear, vanish, and die to us. When we take hold of dream memories, it is like taking hold of photographs. We write them down, we try to “fix” the images in our memory, to “save” the dream from extinction. We have dream notebooks, just as we have photo albums.

Now, as you say, does not the dream animal want us, desire us to enact it or become it? *I don't know*. In my dream, for example, the tiger seemed to get what *it* wanted *in the dream*. It seemed to want relationship with me and that is what happened in the dream. We connected. Now, I can't change that text, that sequence of the dream images, the *story* of that dream. It is what it is and always will be. It is eternal in that sense. Still, we are taught to relate to the dream image, to carry on active imagination, or to manifest the dream tiger in images, or body movements, or *something*. Even to imagine that the tiger “wants” this or *something* from us. I relish this aspect of dream work and teach it to others and have for a very long time. But I can't say with any real assurance that I *know* what the tiger wants or whether any of this stuff we do relates to what the tiger wants. But that dream animals (and all figures in dreams) have desires and wants, of that I am convinced, just as characters in any story have wants and desires . . . that is the nature of story.

Nonetheless, what we are doing with all this “animation” is keeping the images “alive” in the face of the *death* inherent in every dream. It is not that this is right or wrong, productive or not, but that there is, in fact, *another* effect of the dream that is *different* from all these attempts to enliven, enact, and manifest. I have written elsewhere that *every dream has to do with the future*. This, of course, flies in the face of most of psychology's efforts to try to understand the dream in relation to the *past*. But if every dream is death, am I not contradicting myself? I don't think so. There are two reasons why. First, we need to parse the fact of human culture, that death has been always and everywhere connected to images, ideas, and beliefs about *life* after death. Whether it is so, we do not know; nor do we *know* that death is eternal.

But more to the point is the *second* tiger in my experience. Now this was not the product of my conscious effort as active imagination would be or as manifesting it in a painted or sculpted image would, even though I did those things subsequently. No, that second tiger was an embodied *reality* in some way that was a *direct result* of the dream tiger. The main point I want to make is that *this* tiger is not “fixed” in a dream text in any way—not dead! I experience it as an *ongoing* presence, and it has informed my work with the dream tiger as much as or even more than my deliberate conscious efforts. This tiger was and remains alive in ways that were not *in* the dream, and this tiger continues to haunt me in that sense of “frequent visitor.” It is this that leads me to say that *this* tiger embodies the future.

**RH:** I would like to share my dream animals story, Russ, and see if we have had similar experiences. Many years ago, a red snake appeared in a dream, and over the

years Red Snake and I have had countless conversations, usually in active imagination. Red Snake has been kept alive and has been a very significant part of my life. Later, I had a dream of a gorilla, and over the years Gorilla has become an important aspect of my athletic life (now golf and tennis). Gorilla is a presence, not in active imagination, but inside me when I am playing. My wife, Janis, is an artist and painted Red Snake, and that painting has always hung in my office. A watercolor artist who was a client painted Gorilla, and that painting, too, has been in my office. Do these experiences touch with your views?

**RL:** Wonderful examples, Rob, of what I call *dream alchemy*. The central operation of alchemy is *imaginatio*—although you will never find it described as such by the alchemists or the systematizers. I'm sure you can recall the red snake dream and the gorilla dream *as such*. The dreams, like photographs, remain unchanged, fixed, *presented* to us like a work of art, or a story, or a film—gifts.

But through *imaginatio*, your dream snake has been “kept alive,” as you say, and has become part of the very fabric of your life—*gold* if you will. And not just your *own imaginatio*, but that of your artist wife and artist client. (You are bringing up a *social* dimension of dreaming and its potency for informing the imaginative capacities of our culture—something not well attended to when we keep dreams only in the privacy of the consulting room and dream journals.) Your gorilla has an ongoing “presence” in your body and is an example of a dream image becoming *embodied* through the imagination—*imaginatio* is not just active imagination. These ongoing experiences, the “living” quality of them, are evidence of the fruitfulness of the imagination. Note, especially in your examples, that you have not referred to the “meaning” of the red snake or the gorilla. Through the vehicle of imagination, the images have “become meaning” for you in a living way—not something you “figured out” or “analyzed” or “interpreted.”

I am reminded of something that struck me in Herbert Silberer's rather neglected text, *Hidden Symbolism of Alchemy and the Occult Arts* (1917/1971). He referred to *three* aspects of imagination: the *contents* of imagination, the *functions* of imagination, and the *somatic* processes of imagination. Of the latter, he wrote, “It is not capable of interesting us in the present connection so we pass it by.” I find that lacuna fascinating. Ever since 1917, when this work was published, that lacuna has not been the object of much focus in relation to dreams or the imagination.

Yet, what you bring up in your examples of the red snake and the gorilla, crucial and important as they are, are not the same as the “second tiger” I referred to earlier. I, too, have done active imagination, paintings, and sculptures of the “first tiger” in the dream and *that* tiger is alive to me in ways similar to your red snake. But I also know now that the “second tiger” is present as well (often both tigers at the same time!) and in ways that are constantly changing. In one way or another, “first tiger” seems *constrained* by its relation to the original dream, whereas “second tiger” is more spontaneous,

comes into my experience unbidden, and in surprising ways. It is always accompanied by what I would call “strange” body experiences, as if it had an electrical quality on some occasions, a gravitational quality on others—but always *embodied*. Perhaps your gorilla had a similar origin. I have not yet found the right language to refer to this double aspect, although I have now experienced it in relation to numerous dreams, and it is now something I am finding in others’ experience. But one has to “fish” for it, so to speak. Perhaps in responding to your questions some suitable way of referring to this subtle reality will come to us.

**RH:** What is your response to what Hillman says in this quote?

Blessing by the animal still goes on in our civilized lives, too. Let’s say you have a quick and clever side to your personality. You sometimes lie, you tend to shoplift, fires excite you, you’re hard to track and hard to trap; you have such a sharp nose that people are shy of doing business with you for fear of being outfoxed. Then you dream of a fox! Now that fox isn’t merely an image of your “shadow problem,” your propensity to stealth. That fox also gives an archetypal backing to your behavioral traits, placing them more deeply in the nature of things. The fox comes into your dream as a kind of teacher, a doctor animal, who knows lots more than you do about those traits of yours. And that’s a blessing. Instead of a symptom or a character disorder you now have a fox to live with, and you need to keep an eye on each other. (Hillman and McLean 1997, 4–5)

**RL:** Well, notice first that we do not get the dream . . . only that there was a fox in it. And then we have a series of ideas about the archetypal fox, that it’s not just the personal shadow, that it comes as teacher, healer, an image that carries deep foxy traits. It’s a blessing and not to be nominally named “something else,” such as a symptom or a character trait. All good stuff and I love seeing Hillman’s mercurial mind at work on an image. But, in this instance, given what we are talking about, I want the dream itself, I want what the dream *did* to the dreamer.

Now let me play with this a bit. Did you know that in folk etymology *Russell*, my first name, means “sly fox”? Russell itself comes from a word meaning “red” and that red got itself associated with the red-tailed fox. People who know me know I am true to my name. Okay, so follow a bit of my slyness further. I had a dream once in which I saw a hole in the ground around my home. An odd light emanated from it, seemed to quiver in that curious way one sees on a hot highway. The morning of the dream I went walking about the land and what caught my eye was a stone that was sparkling in the sunlight. I sat down there and watched that light. Then I could feel “something else.” I looked up, and a few feet away stood a fox. He was watching me. I watched him. After a time, he turned and walked back into the woods, stopping several times to look back at me. The dream of the light from a hole in the ground led me to a rock that was sparkling in the sunlight and that led me into being face to face with a fox. I lay back on the ground, full of this encounter with the fox, and what happened then was a flood

tide of memories that came flowing back unbidden. You won't find fox associated with memory anywhere, but *this* fox, I believe, was instrumental in releasing memories—and there was nothing *sly* about it. Likewise, a dream fox may produce very unexpected effects on the dreamer, and that is what I want to emphasize because what constitutes the matrix of these effects may not relate in any way to our “ideas” about fox, or our history of fox as a symbol, or fox as a fairy tale or mythological character.

Among the memories that came in that fox-released flood was the memory of a story I had written in junior high school called “When Dreams Stopped.” It was a story about what happened to the world when there was no more time for dreams. The dreams rebelled by disappearing altogether, and the world was without dreams for a long time. Then a young boy began to experience strange things in his sleep. His worried parents took him to doctors, and he was declared “mad” because he would speak “nonsense” about animals talking to him in his sleep, about trees talking to him, about rocks and plants telling him things and that these things would “come true” and they would happen in the world. By then no one knew it was dreams. My teacher told me that I had plagiarized this story. Over the years, I have wanted to turn this story into a novel and always got *stopped*, just like the dreams got stopped in the story, and as pictured in the dream I had that prompted the story in the first place.

More recently, and sparked by dreams and most particularly by dream animals—especially by a dream owl with a quill pen—I have begun writing again, and this time I am making progress.

**RH:** As often happens once a topic opens up, others pick up on it. A client brought in a dream this week that had an animal. What would be your approach to this dream? The dreamer is a fifty-year-old married woman who is finishing Seminary and preparing to enter the ordained ministry.

Here is her dream:

*I am in a room of my home and I look down onto the floor and see a snake crawling from out beneath a dresser. I am alarmed and anxious, as I fear snakes. I do not like them and I do not think they like me. The snake is not large, but is rather skinny, small and colorful, orange and yellow. I watch as it slowly slithers its way across the floor. I look for a higher place to go as I pull up my legs and try to get away from it. I am on guard and anxious to see where it has gone. I am trying to get away from it. I warn my husband and son. My son then discovers more snakes under the dresser. They are babies. I am freaked out as I consider ways to kill the snake. I remember a concoction I would mix that would kill them. I want to avoid all of them.*

**RL:** Here, we do not have the benefit of knowing what the dream snake (and the baby snakes) brought forth in the dreamer in terms of what I have referred to as “resonant presence.” Nonetheless, I can use the dream text to illustrate how I might go about this. I would like to point out something here that is often overlooked. When a dream is *presented* to me, whether my own dream or the dream of another, whether



in person or, as here, in text, this “double” aspect of resonant presence will *still* occur to some degree. You have given me the dream text. That text will not *change*—it will remain “fixed” like a photograph. Immediately, as I read this text for the first time, it was *not* the animal image that came alive in me as a resonant presence, even though that is our topic. What came alive for me, spontaneously, and now *dwells* in me somewhat hauntingly, was the woman’s “concoction” that she knew how to make to kill the snake. Now, if I move too quickly into interpreting my reaction as some countertransference phenomenon, I begin to move away from the *presence* of the concoction and on into potential therapeutic maneuvers, analysis of motivations, image amplifications, and all sorts of such things. These may all be useful at some point, but it is decidedly *not* the point of the resonant presence that this concoction has engendered in my own psyche. In this sense, I believe that a lot of what happens in the face of a dream, whether our own or another’s, is to move too quickly away from what I am here calling the “resonant presence” that a dream image engenders spontaneously. And, quite obviously, I am not in any way talking about associations and other such conscious processes that are clearly something else.

I think that resonant presence is the vehicle of what Barthes called *punctum*, that is, the element of a photograph *outside* the photographer’s intention (which he calls the *studium* of a photograph). Barthes says it is the *punctum* that makes the photograph “exist” for him (1981, 25–28). Applied here to this dream text, it is the concoction that makes this dream exist for me—because it has “taken up residence in me” unbidden, uninvited; but nonetheless that concoction is now *alive* in me.

And what are the consequences of this? How can a concoction be alive? My mind wants quickly to flee into alchemical connotations, into witches’ brews, into myths and fairy tales that come ready like chariots to take me off into the land of interpretation. But lately I’ve been calling a halt to all that and trying instead to “stay with” the resonant presence itself, no matter how subtle, in a sense to let *it* take the lead. One thing I have become aware of is that where it leads is unpredictable. This unpredictability (in contrast to so much of our interpretive predictability) is important in many ways I am only beginning to understand.

In the dream text, the dreamer only “remembers” a concoction. The concoction is not actually *in* the dream except by this implication that she would mix it to kill the snake. But in my experience of her dream text, the concoction comes alive in me, becomes resonantly present, most definitely *not* an *as if*. If she had just told me this dream and the concoction had come alive in me the way it did in reading the text, what would I do? I can truthfully say I don’t know, because so very much depends on what became resonantly present in her and in me in *the field of the telling*. Still, one of my most frequent experiences in focusing more intently on the resonant presence is that what has become *punctum* for me in the dream is *not* what the dreamer focuses on. This disparity is important.



**RH:** In your experience, if we stay with the resonant presence that the dream image engenders, what are some of the things that happen? Often dreamers look for meaning in their dreams, perhaps a single insight.

**RL:** The general hunger for meaning makes this inescapable. But there is a cost. The cost is the potential loss of intimacy with the *experience* the dream engenders—something akin to what Marshall McLuhan was speaking of when he referred to the *medium* as the message. We so quickly want to know what the dream “means” that we hurry past something I think may be more crucial—the *immediacy of resonant presence*. If we can stay not only with the pull of meaning but also with the resonant presence, one of the things that happens is the emergence of a tension, as if suddenly there was a different *structure* than one’s intentionality. This structure has *immanence*—something like a supersaturated solution at just that moment before precipitating something solid out of a clear liquid.

What I find most fascinating about this—whether in relating to my own dreams or in being in the presence of others’ dreams, is that this “precipitate” is often a *synchronistic event!* It is the loss of this immanent structure and its possibilities that is one cost of too eagerly seeking after meaning.

**RH:** Can you share such a synchronistic experience?

**RL:** Before answering your question, I want to comment on synchronicity. Synchronicity is typically an “asymmetric” concept. What I mean by this is that if we have a dream and then the next day a “related” event occurs in the outer world, then we are likely to speak of synchronicity. But if the outer event occurs first and then we dream about it, we do not invoke the concept of synchronicity. So in synchronistic experiences, the critical images of a dream occur first and are then followed by the outer-world event. I would say two things: first, that we may need to rethink this asymmetry in order to recover an older, more primitive sense of awe at the world’s entering our dreamscape; and, second, we may need to rethink the “acausal” nature of synchronicity—certainly in relation to older concepts of causality from which the “acausal” derives its meaning. The contemporary thinking about causality has, in fact, returned a deep mystery to causality, and it behooves us not to be lax about these new ways of thinking. This is not the place to take this up now, but my reply to your question may not make much sense unless I at least mention this perspective on synchronicity.

Consider again the tiger dream and the “two tigers”—one *in* the dream and one *somewhere else*, roving, as it were, outside the dreamscape. After telling this tiger dream to a friend, he sent me a link to some photographs of a Buddhist monastery where the monks live among freely roaming tigers. There were photos of monks hugging the tigers, the tigers hugging the monks, and all manner of such two-way interactions. In a small way, because of the dream, I knew the joy the monks must experience in being so engaged and related to this phenomenal animal as a part of everyday life.

Just to “see” this kind of intimacy with the tiger was stunning, and it reanimated the joy I experienced in the dream. Then, as if not to be left out, the haunting sense of that second tiger welled up in my experience and I began to tremble—one of the strange body phenomena that often accompany the resonant presence. I did not call this tiger; it came on its own. Its presence was undeniable. It “took over” the direction of my experience. I had the oddest sensation of looking about me with “different eyes,” as if seeking something—recall the sense of “desire” I spoke of earlier. My eyes landed on a coffee stain on some desktop papers. What I saw there was not a tiger, but a monkey! Like that flood of memories induced by the encounter with the fox, this time, looking with tiger eyes, I was immediately filled with an enthusiasm for photographing “found animals” in places we pass by unnoticed: animals in coffee stains on a desk, in oil stains in the street, on the bark of trees, in shadows, in chaotic patterns—anywhere! Thus, the resonant presence of the tiger gave birth to the future in the form of a project that now engages me and causes me to “take in the world” with new eyes.

Of course, this can be explained as so much everyday projection. But does the camera *project*, or does it *capture* the image lying there *in potentia*, in wait? And what is *potentia* but the future waiting for our participation? The root of this word reminds us that it images something “powerful” and that one of its major compounds leads to the images of “stranger,” “guest,” “host,” and, as the dictionary says, “someone with whom one has reciprocal duties of hospitality.”

For me, this sense of “hosting” not only the dream but also the resonant presences the dream engenders becomes one of the ways I directly experience what I think Jung was getting at when he spoke of the *Coming Guest*, which he calls “the future and the picture of the new world.”

Rob, I hope this gives you some sense, not so much of what *I* do when an animal appears in a dream, but more of what the animal—as living spirit, even the *Coming Guest* itself—*gives birth to in me*. Once released from the dreamscape, the animal is free to animate within me—in subtle and not so subtle ways—thus prompting incarnations of the future. It is my responsibility to serve as host and agent for this process.

How wonderful it was, then, after being so immersed in what the tiger dream engendered, to receive your invitation to participate in this interview on dream animals. Thank you for that!

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**ABSTRACT**

Animals frequently are present in dreams. In this interview, Russell Lockhart suggests that a dream animal calls forth a resonance in the dreamer. He proposes that the dream animal contains a desire and that desire is a future. Lockhart suggests the dreamer stay with the resonance and its unpredictable lead.

**KEY WORDS**

alive, animals, Roland Barthes dream alchemy, dream animals, dreams, future, Russell Lockhart, photography, resonance, resonant presence, synchronicity