

# Die Herrin der Tiere and the **BP Oil Spill** in the Gulf of Mexico

*When I was a child, I saw God, I saw angels;  
I watched the mysteries of the higher and  
lower worlds. I thought all men saw the same.  
At last I realized that they did not see ...*

—Shams of Tabriz

A colleague tapped my arm, wanting my attention. We were sitting in a sunny room at a long conference table in Zurich, part of an international meeting of colleagues and old friends in connection with the psychology of Carl Jung. She pointed to her Mac Book Pro: on the screen, filling the entire space, spilling its emotional content across the ocean, onto Europe, and eerily connecting us to the Gulf of Mexico, I saw a young Louisiana pelican, his brown wings soggy, saturated with heavy, glistening oil—oil that has been spewing from our greedy blood-letting of great Mother Earth deep below the surface of the Gulf of Mexico. My stomach revolted—I could not tolerate more than that initial glimpse of this horrific image: a beautiful animal, a creature of the sky, silently caught within deadly, sticky, slick torture. I turned away. What a devastating image of our relationship with animals, I thought, deeply sad and disturbed.

But the image would not allow me to turn away for long. A couple of days later I returned to Birmingham and to my home where I see clients in a spacious sunny room, windows on three sides, shaded by enormous trees and with a panoramic view of my garden, flowers, squirrely squirrels performing masterful acrobatics and all kinds of chirping birds. Suddenly, synchronistically, my eyes were drawn to a low bookshelf and a casual little triptych – altar I had dreamily assembled over the last three years. It consists of three images: two postcards to the right and left of a photograph. Each post card shows a mythological female figure, and between them, about half a year ago, I had placed the photo of a white European pelican. A Swiss colleague and friend had sent me all three. We trained together as analysts and share many interests. Whenever either of us is particularly drawn to or moved by an image, we exchange information about it, wonder about its story and its archetypal implications which we understand to lie behind the personal appeal. As Jungians we assume that anything that stirs our emotions profoundly usually has its roots deeply embedded in the fabric not only of our personal unconscious but often as

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PELICAN © Markhiggi | Dreamstime.com

well in the collective unconscious and that this content is calling to be befriended, known, made conscious. The two female figures are representations of Die Herrin der Tiere, which Edith had sent me in 2007 and 2009. I was quite unaware that I might be doing something of some consequence, when I assembled them to form the wings of a triptych, framing the central image of the pelican, but suddenly I understood that my unconscious was acting through me—my eyes had been opened only days ago by the tragic image of a brown Gulf Coast pelican drenched in deadly oil on a computer screen a continent away.

Prior to this synchronistic event, Edith and I had done some research on the archetype of Die Herrin der Tiere, whom Erich Neumann refers to as the Lady of the Beasts (chapter 14) and Martin P. Nilsson calls the Lady of the Wild Things (p. 15). Suddenly these images, as they stood by the pelican feeding its brood, configured themselves into a strange and newly meaningful pattern that wanted to be explored. In the following, I want to present some of what I learned about the images of this triptych, how they relate to one another as well as their connection to the psychology of Carl Jung and thus to our personal and collective psyches as well as to the tragedy we are witnessing in the Gulf of Mexico.

## THE QUEEN OF THE NIGHT

The first Lady of the Beasts who drew my attention was the Queen of the Night. In Erich Neumann's tome, *The Great Mother*, she is called Lilith, Goddess of Death (p.



196). The postcard shows a female figure on a plaque, made of straw-tempered clay, a bas-relief, about twenty inches tall; it is more than 3,000 years old and comes from Mesopotamia, which we now know as Iraq. Molded out of the relief is a curvaceous, very beautiful, young, naked woman. According to the British Museum—which acquired the precious artifact in 2003 to celebrate that institution’s 250th anniversary—the entire piece was originally multicolored: red, white and black. Over the centuries the paint has worn off. I find the colored reconstruction disconcerting and distracting from my esthetic enjoyment of the piece, although the colors do add important dimensions to understanding the symbolic meaning of the sculpture. According to the museum’s description, she wears the “horned headdress characteristic of a Mesopotamian deity.” She holds a rod and ring of justice in each of her upraised hands—further attributes of her divinity. Her long wings are folded downward behind her back, framing her lovely figure. They touch the back of her thighs. The downward bent of the wings leads us to interpret the figure as a representation of a goddess of the Underworld. Her mythical otherworldliness is further underlined by her legs, which end in talons like those of a bird of prey. She is flanked by two very tall, leggy, taloned owls. Furthermore, and to emphasize their symbolic connectedness, both the birds and the female figure were once painted the same color scheme: the bodies, the legs, and talons in bright red, while the down-folded wings of all three were once multicolored in exactly the same eye catching pattern pointing to their common spiritual bird nature, creatures which belong to the sky, the spiritual realms. The goddess has planted her talons firmly yet quite naturally and easily on the backs of two resting lions. Their manes were painted black while their

bodies remained the natural color of the baked clay. At the bottom of the relief and under the talons of the owls and the bellies of the lions we see a scale pattern, which indicates the mountains of Mesopotamia, where the joining of the rivers Euphrates and Tigris formed the cradle of Western civilization. All five creatures stand out from a black background, which gave the relief its name, Queen of the Night; all five gaze out at us with a serious, calm, very natural otherworldly authority in complete harmony with one another as the color scheme indicates.

What had originally appealed so deeply to my emotions, was the utter beauty of the piece, the woman grounded, calmly resting in the obvious feminine authority within herself: she seems a “virgin,” one unto herself yet easily related to the outer world of the beasts as well as her human observers. The relief was thought to be part of a shrine. This resting in one’s inner feminine authority is something I find at times sadly missing in my life as well as that of many of my clients, and in our Western culture in general: and so, for some years, this postcard served as a reminder of this inner truth.

This is a state of being quite other than that of the impressive masculine heroic conqueror energy which can degenerate so readily into its negative pole, the Faustian attitude to which Jung referred in many places in his life’s work (Jung, vol. 20 [Index](#)).

#### DIE HERRIN DER TIERE—LADY OF THE BEASTS

Six months ago my friend Edith sent me a postcard of another female figure surrounded by animals. She had found her in a recent archeological exhibition of Stone Age artifacts that the Celts and the Romans found in the Canton Bern in Switzerland. Among the precious ancient artifacts is a bronze *hydria* (vessel or jug) found in Grachwil. It was produced around 580 BC in the Greek colony of Tarent in Puglia, southern Italy. The vessel has two decorated side handles and an especially elaborate middle handle, miraculously well preserved. It is a complex bronze cast representing a winged female goddess identified as Potnia Theron (queen of wild beasts). Presentations of winged female figures with animals was quite popular in the Bronze and early Iron ages as attested to by numerous finds in the entire Mediterranean area as well as in central and southern Europe extending all the way to Egypt and perhaps originating in Asia (Neumann, Schuhmann).

In her representation on the handle of the *hydria* of Grachwil, the Potnia Theron “wears a long, decorated dress, belted at the waist, and a crown; she holds a hare in each one of her hands, one by the front legs, the other by the rear legs. She is accompanied by two lions with one of the paws of each lion resting at her side. An eagle is perched on her crown and two snakes are attached to the sides of her head with yet another lion sitting on each” (Koch, p. 842).

The archetypal theme as represented in the two images of the Lady of the Beasts (on the handle of the *hydria* of Grachwil and in the Mesopotamian relief) is that of a great feminine presence centered in and holding the balance of opposites, and with that the circular rhythmically of nature: two lions above and two lions below; two hares, one facing up, one down; and two snakes slithering away from the central figure in opposite directions; two owls; two lions; and two rods and rings of justice. She is the ruler of animals and governs the principle of opposites, of up and down, the great round of life (the rabbits), right and left, movement in opposite directions (the snakes and rabbits), life and death (color scheme), masculine and feminine (rod and ring), of

sky—spirit and earthly reality—and ground (birds and snake), of nature and culture (animals and human figure), of consciousness and the unconscious. She would be an image for relating to our inner nature, to our inner regal lion, to our own rabbit-like heated sexuality, to woman's ability to intuitively see in the dark of the unconscious like owls, to our soul's soaring to heavenly heights like the eagle, and to our self-evident authority over the beast or monster within. She represents—by projection, of course—the great inner feminine authority in relation to animals.

This psychic energy is quite different from that of the beautiful and heroic St. George, who kills the dragon, different as well from the emotional lethargy that is at work when we anesthetize our natural, instinctual selves, as do so many who flee into the unrelated, unnatural “second lives” of the present day computer world. The archetype of the Lady and the Beasts shows woman's natural connection to the animal within and without.

Being at the center of opposites, holding the tension between authority and kindness, the Great Goddess furthers the development of will and action among men, and she also promotes spirit and growth. She is an imago for the opposites of unipolar rapacious and irresponsible greed as exemplified by the mega corporations of our day—which are considered too big to die natural deaths, i.e., go bankrupt—is without tension and thus out of balance, far removed from the round of nature and therefore dehumanizing to mankind. I am reminded of the sad image of the pelican, soiled with black slick, an arresting and deeply disturbing image of the result of our twenty-first century's exploitative Faustian attitude toward nature—inside and out, of plants, beasts, and the human psyche.

Now to return to the central image of my triptych, the photo of a pelican.

## THE PELICAN

**E**dith's photo of a pelican was taken in the castle of Chillon on Lake Geneva. The image is small and seems to be part of the frescoes from 1343 AD, which adorn



Hydria of Gräichwil, bronze, 570 BC

the castle's *camera domini*—a sort of fourteenth century master bedroom suite. The image shows a white bird in profile with red wings against a dark blue background. She pecks away at her chest – the blood spurts out in three streams like red life lines or umbilical chords that flow into the beaks of three baby birds in a nest that nestles on the blue background like a small ship on the waves of Lac Lemman.

The pelican is a water bird; the ones that live on the shores of the Gulf of Mexico are very large, heavy, brown birds with huge wings and a very pointed beak with which they can break through the surface of the water with deadly accuracy and speed to spear fish. When she arrives at the nest, the parent bird bends her head in order to take fish out of the big pouch under her beak to feed the young.

In Christian symbolic iconography the pelican does not have a pouch but wounds itself on the chest in order to make blood flow to its young. A very old legend says that the young are lifeless, either killed by a snake, or very feeble from birth, or killed by their father in a fit of righteous wrath. After three days of grieving the father tears his breast open with his beak and, at the cost of his life, “under the warm shower of his blood, the dead baby birds begin to stir and come back to life, beating their wings joyfully and burrowing into their father's downy feathers” (Charbonneau-Lassay, p. 258). The symbolic understanding is that the human race is dead to the life of the spirit—our souls are without life, needy for nourishment. According to Christian mythology, Christ the Savior then poured his blood over mankind to give us back the only true life, that of the spirit, restoring us to our soulful humanity. It was only later that the mystic pelican came to be understood to be nourishing his young with his blood—feeding them like a mother nurses her babies, selflessly giving of her essence, her milk. The medieval “bestiarum” mentions that a characteristic of the pelican is to only take in as much food as is necessary to maintain life—exemplifying restraint (Knaur). Carl Jung saw in the story of the pelican an *allegoria Christi*—a story of a savior whose blood nourishes and restores the essence of humanity to mankind. (CW 8, 559 and other places)

**T**o return to the beginning:

What do we do with this information? What did the unconscious want to express using me to assemble the triptych of these three images? What am I/are we supposed to understand?

I returned to the very first, the computer image: the pelican whose life, according to environmental sources, is probably not salvageable. We will lose a huge number of the pelicans on the shores of the Gulf, parents as well as chicks because now is the nesting season for these animals. If we understand this symbolically, our culture is endangering the very ideas and behaviors these animals embody for us:

Dedicated as we are to the concrete and to materialism, our present day culture threatens to force us into ever narrower bell curves of our emotional life. By overvaluing the rational, scientific viewpoint and approach, we humans are becoming an endangered species. Oiled away will be our ability to deeply feel, our ability to believe in the miraculous, and our trust in the invisible energies of love and respect for others.

Restraint, another of pelican's characteristics, is a human trait that has quite gone out of fashion—expansiveness has taken its place. We think in terms of: bigger, better, faster, smarter,

richer, younger, larger, etc. By increasing our outer possessions, we are decreasing our psyche's varied richness.

The pelican is focusing on raising her young—sacrificing of herself to give life and nourishment to the next generation of pelicans. What kind of sacrificing do we do for the next generation? Have we prepared a safe, joyous, life-giving and life-sustaining environment for them? How much of our lively fluids, liquidity, and money do we offer them for their outer and, just as important, for their inner growth? Is being a soulful human anything our society, mental health professionals, and insurance companies value, encourage, and invest in with money? It seems to me we are not only severely diminishing the pelican population, not to mention a host of other plant and animal species and ways of life, but what the pelican stands for in our souls is destined for a slimy, slow death on the altar of irresponsible, self-indulgent greed. And I wonder what can be the place for Jungian analysis in a world that, according to reports I received from a Swiss accreditation committee, sees long-term psychotherapy (and by extension psychoanalysis) as unethical and which will be outlawed and illegal in the foreseeable future? Are we Jungians, like Philemon and Baucis, simply to be a bump in the road of Faust's all-consuming progress?

A triptych consists of three parts: a centerpiece (here it is the pelican) and two wings (here the imagoes of Die Herrin der Tiere). The wings can be folded over the centerpiece. Usually the outer decorations of the wings are not very impressive. With the wings closed, the central image is protected, and opened they enlarge on the central story.

Here the central image reminds us of an endangered animal in our world and as well of an endangered aspect of our psyche.

It seems to me the winged goddesses on the triptych's wings may be symbolic images of a certain kind of female energy (part of the male as well as the female of our species!), which could protect the pelican aspect of our soul. If justice, inner authority (rather than ego power), alignment with the rules of nature, and respect for the world around us—as Francis of Assisi and most Native American tribes practiced—would rule our psyches now, the inner and outer pelicans would stand a chance. It is truly up to each one of us individually.

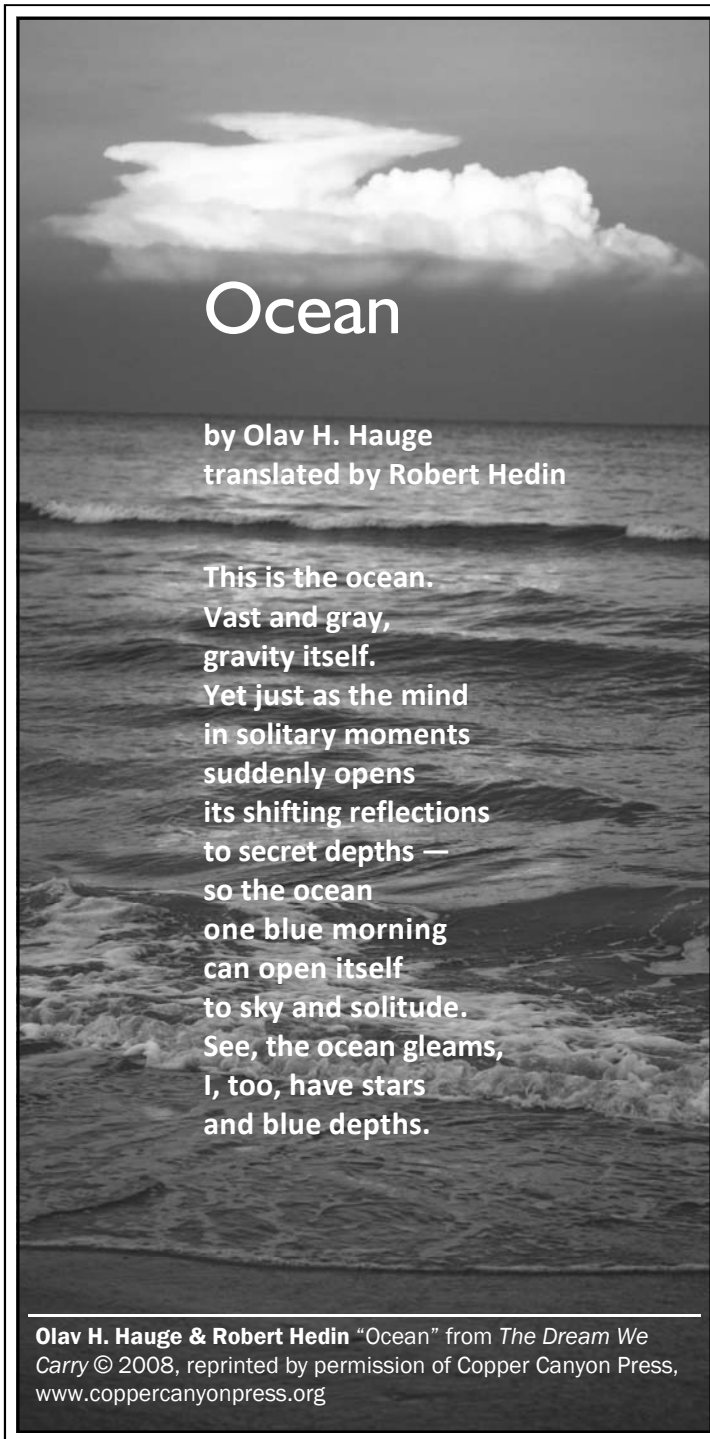
Recently I discovered an image of St. Margaret in a tiny church up in the Alps. It showed the saint, Margaret of Antioch, holding a rather large, fierce looking medieval dragon on a loose leash. Like the Lady and the Unicorn, she belongs to the tradition of the archetype of Die Herrin der Tiere—showing us an alternative way of relating to nature without and within. Legend has it that St. Margaret's mother died when she was an infant and that a Christian servant woman raised her. A Roman prefect noticed the beautiful young Margaret and tried to seduce her. She refused, was denounced as an outlaw Christian and incarcerated. In the nasty dark pits of her prison the devil appeared to her in form of a dragon, tried to swallow her up, but she bravely faced him, cross in hand. This is a very convincing image of facing one's inner dragon. Not only does she lead the dragon on a loose leash in some representations, in some she also stands on him (similar to the Queen of the Night on the relief from Mesopotamia) while on others she emerges out of the dragon's belly. Her legend predates that of St. George, who slays the dragon monster in a mighty and heroic fight. This may indicate that we have lost one option of how to deal with monstrous forces in our psyche as well as around us.

It is my belief that my unconscious tried to awaken me to the realization of an alternate way of being in the world: respectfully

and from a standpoint of inner certitude preserving all that flies, creeps and crawls, swims, jumps, and buzzes—all that barks, howls, roars and chirps, whinnies and meows!

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# Ocean

by Olav H. Hauge  
 translated by Robert Hedin

This is the ocean.  
 Vast and gray,  
 gravity itself.  
 Yet just as the mind  
 in solitary moments  
 suddenly opens  
 its shifting reflections  
 to secret depths —  
 so the ocean  
 one blue morning  
 can open itself  
 to sky and solitude.  
 See, the ocean gleams,  
 I, too, have stars  
 and blue depths.

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