

The Secret of Roan Inish

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A few years after the Coneely clan leaves the island of Roan Inish and her father moves to an inland factory town, Fiona, who is about 10 years old, is sent to live with her grandparents, Hugh and Tess, who have stayed along the coast. As her boat arrives, a seal and Fiona watch each other.

On her first night, Fiona is able to see Roan Inish, which Hugh tells her is quite rare. He also relates the story of Sean Michael, the ancestor who first moved to Roan Inish and started the settlement. She also meets her cousin Amin, who is about 15. Hugh, Tess and Amin are the only members of the Coneely clan who still live by the sea.

She learns the family left Roan Inish because the young people got bored with the old ways and wanted to move to the city. Soon Hugh tells her about the day the family left Roan Inish. Her infant brother Jamie disappeared that day when his bassinet, which had been sitting at the sea's edge, mysteriously floated out to sea while a storm suddenly came up. Fiona suggests Jamie might still be alive but no one thinks that's possible.

Hugh, Amin and Fiona take a rowboat to Roan Inish. Seals watch and follow them. Fiona is sure one is the seal who watched her when she arrived on the island and announces his name is Jack. When they arrive at Roan Inish, Hugh and Amin leave Fiona so they can tend the fishing pots. She looks in the old cottages and sees evidence that someone is living in one. She thinks it's Jamie. When she tells her grandparents, they dismiss it as just her imagination.

Fiona meets Tie, a cousin of her father, who tells her about Liam, an ancestor who married Newla, a Selkie, half woman and half seal. However, the pull of the sea was too strong and Newla

eventually left the family and returned to a life as a seal. On her next trip to Roan Inish with Amin, Fiona sees Jamie but he runs away. Amin doesn't believe her.

Hugh and Amin go fishing in foggy weather but Tess won't let Fiona go. Hugh and Amin forget their sandwiches and Fiona goes after them, but they've already left. She sees a dilapidated rowboat and gets in. Seals, led by Jack, guide and pull the boat to Roan Inish. Fiona sees Jamie's bassinet and goes up to the cottages where she sees him playing with a seal. He runs away again. Fiona calls to the seals to send him back to his family. This time Amin believes her.

Fiona and Amin decide to get Hugh and Tess to move back to Roan Inish. They begin secretly fixing up the cottages. The seals watch them and take the basket containing their lunch on the first day. Fiona and Amin realize the seals took it for Jamie.

One morning, when they are back with Hugh and Tess, a storm starts. Fiona worries aloud about Jamie and Tess asks about him. Tess, who has been the most skeptical up to now, believes what Fiona tells her. She directs Hugh and Amin to pack some food and clothes and they go to Roan Inish. When the storm is over, Jamie arrives in his bassinet. He starts to run away, but the seals won't let him. He hesitates and then runs into Tess' arms. Fiona thanks the seals. The family is reunited.

The secret of Roan Inish is the secret of the relationship between the conscious and the unconscious, the intellect and the instinct, the island and the air and water around it. This relationship manifests in the way Sean Michael came to Roan Inish, Liam's marriage to Newla, and Jamie's relationship with the seals. The relationship was ruptured when the Coneelys left Roan Inish. Psyche didn't want them to go and held their infant Jamie to maintain its link to them. However, Jamie is too young and undeveloped to carry enough consciousness.

This is the story of how Psyche's desire for more consciousness brings the Coneelys back to Roan Inish to repopulate the island of consciousness in its midst. Psyche operates through various agents, including Fiona and the seals, to reorient the way Hugh, Tess and Amin see the world.

This story also demonstrates how "...soul-making takes place as much through ideation as in personal relationships or meditation" (Hillman p 115). For Fiona, it's constant and steady soul-making as she learns about her heritage and finds her place in it. For Amin, Tess and Hugh, it's a remaking of soul as they become able to work with old ideas they had given up.

Fiona makes soul because she can imagine. She imagines a name for a seal and imagines how Jamie could survive by being cared for by the seals. She can imagine that a seal would play consciously with Jamie. She imagines that the seals can hear her pleas to return Jamie. When she sees their old cabins, she can imagine that someone is living there. She can also imagine Jamie being in danger from the storm and thus winds up telling Tess about him.

The story also shows a delicate interplay between dehumanizing and personifying, pathologizing and psychologizing, and personifying and psychologizing. It demonstrates that we need a polytheistic approach to these concepts.

Although Fiona is the main character, hers is not the psyche of the story because "man exists in the midst of psyche; it is not the other way around. Therefore, soul is not confined by man, and there is much of psyche that extends beyond the nature of man. The soul has inhuman reaches" (Hillman 173). The psyche of the story includes the five living Coneelys (Hugh, Tess, Amin, Fiona and Jamie), the Coneely clan through history, and the island of Roan Inish, as well as the sea, seals and sky around it.

The movie dehumanizes by developing the characters as members of a living history of the Coneely clan. This removes actions from individuals and places them in the context of something larger and outside them, thus expanding psychic space across time. For example, at one point Tess tells Fiona

they are making a soup only the women of Roan Inish know how to make. Occasionally a Coneely is born with Newla's dark looks and intense relationship with the sea. Jamie is seen as a manifestation of this line of dark ones, a tendency which is bigger than just him. Fiona has a dream in which Newla rises from the ocean, bringing the past into the present. When Hugh tells Fiona the story of Sean Michael, the patriarch of the clan, he is overcome with passion while relating a particularly emotional part of the story. It is as if he was possessed by Sean Michael.

The marriage of their ancestor, Liam, to Newla the Selkie was a psychic marriage with the sea. After she returned to the sea, the islanders banned seal hunting, recognizing they lived in a psychic space bigger than just themselves.

Fiona is a psychic catalyst who changes the way that Hugh, Tess and Amin orient themselves in psychological space by helping them reintegrate ideas they had been repressing since they left Roan Inish. Because "a psyche with few psychological ideas is easily a victim" (Hillman 118), their loss of ideas left them adrift and struggling to unquestionably adapt to a life cut off from their family and way of life. Their soul had "... (lost) the ability of seeing through ideas that are imposed upon it. It (asked) the wrong questions and (forgot) itself as soul; it (turned) to ideas from other areas and (was) blinded by the dazzling illuminations coming to it through notions of nature, of history, or of religion" (Hillman 118).

Tess and Hugh lost their psychological ideas about the goodness and magic of the sea and nature. They had been dazzled by the myth of progress and the movement toward the city. They had turned away from their heritage on Roan Inish and were trying to see themselves as singular agents instead of dehumanizing their experience into participation in the larger psyche in which they dwelt on Roan Inish.

Fiona gives voice to Psyche, whose power helps Tess and Hugh psychologize and see the world through a new version of the old lens they were trying to discard. Because "man can never be large

enough to possess his psychic organs; he can but reflect their activities” (Hillman 173), Fiona must act as a mirror and not an advocate.

Fiona must be unbiased about her own significance as well as that of the other psychic powers in the field. Her ability to dehumanize her own experiences lets her personify Psyche’s elements (especially the seals) and move fully into Psyche and accurately reflect its desires. Her quiet, unshakeable confidence in the truth of her personifying forces the others to see what is happening and eventually to give credence to ideas they had tried to abandon.

Fiona is dehumanized through the many images of her without other people. These images remove her from the world of humans and put her into relationship with the larger world of other psychic elements. Fiona is left alone on her first two trips to Roan Inish while the men go tend their fishing pots. Jamie is even more alone than Fiona. He is naked and completely dehumanized because all his psychological experiences are with nature.

Shared aloneness is not a human bond and this is why Fiona can not get close to Jamie. They relate indirectly through Psyche as Fiona sees him at a distance scampering along the island or riding his bassinet on the sea.

Fiona stops being alone when she and Amin fix up the cottages. This reintroduction of human relatedness to the island extends to both their grandparents and Jamie. The basket they brought with their lunches mysteriously floats away from the shore. The basket returns empty later in the day and they both realize that the food was taken to Jamie. It’s the first nourishment he has received from humans and establishes a bond of human contact which leads to his return.

The sea has long been personified by the Coneely clan and Fiona reenergizes this impulse. Sean Michael had been washed up on the shores of Roan Inish after a shipwreck which drowned his companions. On the day the Coneelys left Roan Inish, the sea and the sky joined forces to hold onto

Jamie. Newla had Liam build a bassinet that was like a boat because she told him the sea would rock their children, just as if it were a parent.

Hugh personifies Roan Inish when Fiona first arrives and he tells her that only those born of the islands can see them. He is giving the island the role of mother as well as the ability to hide or be seen. He is the only one who fishes near Roan Inish and always does well, which must suggest a power of the sea to him. He talks about life on Roan Inish as being surrounded by the sea.

Fiona's ability to personify the seals is crucial to the story. When she first comes to her grandparents' home, she and a seal look at each other in a mutually respectful way. When she makes her first trip to Roan Inish, she recognizes that seal among many and the seals enter the water as she passes. Later, the seals guide her boat through the fog to Roan Inish. She also sees Tie catch a fish with his bare hands (just like a seal does) while he assures her that Jamie isn't missing, just visiting another branch of the family. The seals take her food to Jamie and finally they bring Jamie back to the Coneelys and make him stay there.

Pathologizing, which Hillman describes as "... psyche's autonomous ability to create illness, morbidity, disorder, abnormality, and suffering in any aspect of its behavior and to experience and imagine life through this deformed and afflicted perspective" (Hillman 57) occurs in both personal and transpersonal ways. Individuals such as Sean Michael, Liam, Tie and Tess had pathologies which they were able to listen to and honor. However, the entire psyche of the story, encompassing people as well as nature, also pathologizes.

Sean Michael insisted on speaking Irish, which was forbidden by the English overlords, and he was punished. He refused this judgment of wrongness and his father, who had great hopes for his future in the English system, was able to listen to his soul speaking. He let him join their family of fishermen, which led to the shipwreck and the settlement on Roan Inish.

Liam was a loner and was considered a bit odd. Instead of trying to fit in, he kept to himself and it was on one of his solo wanderings that he met the Selkie he married. They lived on the fringes of society where their soulful love sustained them.

Hillman observes that “by regarding our symptoms as the accidents that brought us into therapy rather than as the *via regia* into soul, we neglect their importance in soul-making” (75). While Tie, who is also a dark one, is telling Fiona about Liam, some of his coworkers make fun of him and he strikes out. Although some people might see that as a violent tendency that should be brought under control, it is also an indication that the seal part of his soul needs more development.

Tess is engaged in an “...attempt to envision pathologizing psychologically ... to find a place for it, a way of accepting it, in general and as a whole” (Hillman 57). She has powerful memories of Jamie, which she neither honors nor attempts to cure. Fiona’s certainty finally gives her the strength to acknowledge what Psyche has been telling her all along and she provides the crucial impetus for the return to Roan Inish.

When the Coneely clan abandoned their nature fantasy for a progress fantasy and moved to the city, Psyche pathologized. She tore Jamie, a small and developing center of consciousness, away from the ego and pulled him back into unconsciousness. She redefined the way people and animals relate to each other by substituting seals for people in his life. She let Hugh and Tess drift aimlessly. She sent Jim, Fiona’s father, to an unhappy life in a factory and let him be convinced this was better than life on the island. Instead of pursuing a goal directed cure, Fiona entered Psyche and engaged her. She spoke with the seals, the sea and Jamie. She made soul on a transpersonal level as Psyche imagined a new community for Roan Inish.

The Coneely clan was on Roan Inish because of psychologizing, the realization that “our perceptions are shaped according to particular ideas” (Hillman 121). Sean Michael lived in Ireland at a

time when it was forbidden to speak Irish in the schools because the British didn't want the Irish to see the world through an Irish perspective. He refused to obey this rule and was punished with a humiliation he wouldn't tolerate.

Hugh is unable to psychologize. His way of seeing-through is neutral when it comes to Tie. He feels that Tie isn't sick enough to need a cure, but too strange to listen to. Although Hugh has a lot of evidence about the existence of a larger psyche which could open him to new ideas about living, he cannot make that leap of faith. He is still confused about how fast the storm came up the day Jamie disappeared but is not able to psychologize out of his own lens in order to personify the storm.

Tess prays to Jesus, yet at the end we learn that she had always been certain that Jamie survived. She had replaced her faith in nature with an attempt to believe in the Christian god. The tension between this transcendent god and the immanent psyche grows as Fiona becomes a more powerful symbol of the latter. Eventually, Tess is able to imagine a different way of looking at her experience of Roan Inish and can dehumanize love for Jamie so she could imagine how Jamie might have survived through the love of seals.

Dehumanizing and personifying appear to be closely related. A creature which is part human and part animal, such as a Selkie or the Dark Ones of this story, can be thought of as nature personified or people dehumanized. For Fiona to make contact with the seals and accept what they are doing, she must personify them. However, she can't do this if she considers people to be the only psychic centers, so dehumanizing is an essential first step. However, this is essentially a chicken and egg relationship, because it's also impossible to dehumanize without personifying since dehumanizing requires the recognition of psychic centers outside ourselves.

Hugh gets great fishing at Roan Inish, but others don't. This could be the ocean personifying and giving him fish because it wants him to keep coming back or it could be Psyche dehumanizing to help Hugh realize there is something bigger than himself out there fishing.

The movie also demonstrates the relationship between psychologizing and personifying. We need ideas that allow us to personify. Belief is a growth process because "ideas are both the shape of events, their constellation in this or that archetypal pattern, and the modes that make possible our ability to see through events into their pattern" (Hillman 121). Because Fiona has enough ideas to accept things as they are presented, she is presented with more and more things. As she continues to acknowledge the seals' independent psychic existence, they become more active psychological agents. She is ultimately fully immersed in Psyche and able to reflect its intentions.

Our ability to psychologize and understand the lens through which we see the world impacts the way we pathologize. The more ideas we are aware of, the more tools we have for imagining a way to relate to pathologies. A lack of prejudice can lead to tolerance, but fall short of embracing. Hugh and Tess were able to tolerate Tie, but they did not embrace his insights.

"The Secret of Roan Inish" does a good job of incorporating all four processes which Hillman describes and showing the fascinating and subtle ways they work together in the web we call Psyche.

Works Cited

Hillman, James. *Revisioning Psychology*. New York: HarperPerrenial, 1992.