

CHAPTER 15 FAIRY TALES



92:Fairy Godmother appearing in the hearth to Cinderella

Myth and tales

“Give people a fact or idea and you enlighten their minds, give them a story and you touch their souls.” Geog Feuersteinⁱ

“Deeper meanings reside in fairy tales told to me in my childhood than in the truth that is taught by life.” German Poet Schikerⁱⁱ

“Myth [and tales] is a deliberately chosen means for communicating knowledge.” John Anthony Westⁱⁱⁱ

Fairy tales are seen as simple rudimentary stories written to entertain little children while providing them a moral for their behaviour. Simple fairy tales are far from simple, as they contain hidden Hermetic wisdom. The ancient masters created these tales at the beginning of time, thus they are nearly identical (or at least easily recognizable) all over the earth.

As with all mythology, a story is by far the best way to pass on information. Many ask that if the ancients had knowledge why not just write it in a book like we do and preserve it for all times in libraries? The great library at Alexandria contained more than 500,000 scrolls until the Christians burned it down. The Maya had thousands of books written on bark until Spanish Bishops had all the parchments burnt. During the Middle Ages if books were not hidden they were burnt and lost forever. There is no telling how many wondrous works of wisdom went up in smoke all over the earth during the last two thousand years. It would be easy even today for a government or ruling religious group to deem all books and information on the Internet the work of the devil and destroy them all. All the knowledge that was placed in books to last forever could be lost in a generation.

Mythology and tales are different. They were not created to be placed in books, but to be transmitted orally and stored in the human mind. Is a page of the dictionary or Cinderella easier to remember? The idea being that even if all books were lost, stories would survive in the memory of the population. If the language of an area changes, the books of the old language would be useless if no one could read them. Stories kept in the mind could be changed immediately to the new language. As well, someone without the inner understanding might remember the story and tell it later to someone trained in the mysteries, thus people kept the wisdom alive without even knowing that they were.

In fairy tales the information was hidden in the stories. The more disguised the information, the less likely the ruling authorities would try to persecute. The stories were made interesting for children so they could be learned while young. Every time a fairy tale is read to children, powerful esoteric wisdom is being kept alive. The first time we hear a tale we are children. The second time is when we are parents and reading them to our own children. Likely we have not looked at the tales at all for twenty years, but with more knowledge as we read we may understand some of the hidden wisdom. The next time may be when we are grandparents now with even more knowledge to understand what is being depicted. John Anthony West claims the esoteric quality of the tales touches a person’s inner being, and speaks to our heart.^{iv}

Today, tales are losing some of their luster. In medieval times, storytellers would travel to local villages and tell the tales during the night. It was entertainment for a population without electric lights, radio or

Television. The storytellers would be versed in hundreds of tales, which they knew by heart. To one who has only read a tale and never heard it recited in person has missed a magical element. A story told by a storyteller is brought to life.

Just thirty years ago mythology was still taught in elementary schools, but this is no longer the case as myth and tales are seen as unimportant in the Western scientific world. Today children focus more on the instant gratification of video games and television. Fairy tales are losing their popularity but they are not gone completely. Even in the “Nintendo generation” the tales are still known.^v What is it about them?

The tales passed on to our children today are shells of their original versions. The stories were carefully woven and developed, written as much for adults as they were for children. The Brothers Grimm kept the German folk tales alive in the early 1800’s, and inspired others around the world to do the same. Their original tales, published in 1812, were far different from the same tales reissued in the mid-1800’s. The originals have many references to sex, violence or “taboo” subjects, and in some cases they are terrifying. Their second version edited many of these references out. Most of these “topics not suitable for children” are rarely found in modern editions. This was not so in the period prior to the Victorian age of the mid-1800’s.^{vi} Those who developed these tales wrote in the language of Hermetic symbolism. To cut off one’s head, or tie someone to a tree all had important symbolic meaning for the initiates. In fact some of the symbology was specifically devised to scare off those not wanting to learn the true secrets.

It is a shame that most of the original versions are unknown in the modern world, their “softened Disney-like” versions in their place. Children sense the real truth in the old tales instinctively and know the modern ones are not telling all of it. Read the Disney Cinderella and Grimm’s original version, and it will be no surprise which one will light up the child’s eyes. Amazingly, if one simply worked with the original tale they would find that the heroines were not the passive girls represented in modern texts that Alan Dumas describes as “a sorry excuse for a heroine.” The original girls were active, strong willed, intelligent and created their own destiny rather than wishing for a fairy godmother or a prince to make things all right. A tale of wishing and hoping produces girls who grow up to be passive, waiting for their Prince Charming to come along to save them rather than follow the original tales where they decide what it is they want, and then use all of their resources to go and make it happen.^{vii}

Another group who began working with the tales in the 1900’s were psychologists. Their books describe the tales in the realms of sex, Oedipal feelings, oral fixations and the like. The tales were not created by modern psychologists but by initiates of the Ancient Mystery Schools. The tales do have psychological elements, but Hermeticists are teaching the destruction of the conscious mind. Few modern psychologists work with understanding the ancient silent knowledge. They have found the exoteric (outer) wisdom in the tales, but they are missing the most important esoteric (inner) wisdom. Most only work with modern renditions of the tales, or the French tales of Perrault the modern versions are based on. These modern versions of course are virtually devoid of the ancient wisdom. An example of this is Aesop’s fables which are not esoteric as they do not touch on spiritual truths, they make a point of the psychological.^{viii} Aesop’s fables are meant to be used by the mind exoterically, understanding the content that is in plain view. Fairy tales are meant to be used by the heart and the subconscious mind. It is recommended that if one wants to work with fairy tales, they should find the oldest original versions possible, sex and violence and all. These are the versions that carry the Hermetic wisdom.

Hermetic alchemy is the study of the process of the transformation of a human being from a black lead to an astral gold. This transformation occurs through a process of meditation, knowing thyself, and then purifying and transmuting all that was found to be inferior in the mind, body and spirit. This process was hidden by the terminology of a laboratory and the breakdown and change of substances. Strange drawings displayed furnaces or lab instruments. Their work eventually became the science known today as chemistry, but chemistry is not alchemy. The true alchemist was veiling the process of spiritual transformation. Alchemy is also the basis of modern psychology, which is why for Carl Jung to be a spectacular psychologist he had to first be a spectacular alchemist (which he was, along with studying with African shaman). On the other hand most modern psychologists are not alchemists thus are only able to understand a small piece of what is available in the tales.

Fairy tales have similarities in their construction and writing. Usually there is a difficult set of tasks, or a quest for a treasure that is usually guarded by monsters. The goal is achieved through intelligence, courage, sustained effort and purification of some sort. The quest is actually the path of the spiritual adept. The prize may be a prince, princess or jewels, symbolizing the goal of the high initiate, which is enlightenment. That is why the stories end ‘happily ever after,’ as by the end of the tale the main characters are no longer of the material or

physical world. They are initiates and live in a different way, in a different relationship with the universe and its Creator.^{ix}

Perhaps the most important thing to keep in mind is that the myth is not telling historical events (even though it may be related to actual events). It is written just for the reader. It is a piece of true art, one that can open the doors of illumination to help you transform from an ordinary human being. They are stories of joy, grief, challenge and learning as the initiate travels the path from darkness to light. The myth is meant as a teaching tool for you. Since the only teaching that was deemed value in the mysteries was personal experience, the myths were meant to be lived out by the readers. Muata Ashby claims that just reading a myth will only keep the knowledge in the intellect, not allowing the deep inner truths to be revealed. “You must resolve to discover the myth in every facet of your life, and in so doing you will be triumphant as the hero(ine) of the myth.”^x

Following are examinations of three of the best known tales: Little Red Riding Hood, Cinderella and the Ugly Duckling. It can be helpful to find a version of the tale before reading the following commentary to add to your understanding. In Hans Christian Anderson and Grimm’s there are over 400 tales alone, not to mention all of the other tales from around the world. After reading this book try reading some of the ‘less-known’ tales like Grimm’s “The Story of the Youth Who Went Forth to Learn What Fear Was.” The lesser known stories may in fact contain more wisdom than the popular tales investigated here.

Little Red Riding Hood^{xi}



93: The wolf and Little Red Cap

Grimm’s tale of “Little Red Cap” has an ending that is usually edited out of modern versions. The story starts with a young girl wearing a cap of red velvet that became our familiar riding hood. Red is the colour of the final stage of the Hermetic process. This stage completes work on the upper energy centers located on the head. The title of the story is informing us that the tale concerns the transformation. We find that she has a grandmother who loves her and there “was nothing that she would not have given the child.” The grandmother is likely the higher self. However, we are told the grandmother is ill and weak, thus Red Cap is ignoring her higher/spiritual self. Red Cap is to go and visit her grandmother’s house (a metaphor for the inner mind of the initiate). Her mother gives her a piece of cake and a bottle of wine. The bottle is mentioned a few times in the story and Red Cap is told not to “fall and break the bottle or the grandmother will get nothing.” The bottle must be the ‘vessel’ where the alchemical elixir of life will be fashioned. If it breaks, the work is stopped and none of the wisdom will combine with our highest spiritual part.

The mother tells Red Cap to set out before it gets hot (to start the process immediately), to walk quietly (the process of meditation), and to not run off the path (don’t stray from the Hermetic process). Red Cap went into the woods (the symbol of the dark and difficult journey through ignorance). As soon as she enters (began meditating) she encounters a wolf (the conscious mind that does not want to be silent but constantly howls at us). “She did not know what a wicked creature he was, and was not at all afraid of him,” for she did not understand the dangers that the conscious mind brings. Immediately the wolf started to ask Red Cap questions (as our conscious mind will do with us as soon as we try to quiet it).

Red Cap tells the wolf that her grandmother’s house stands under three oak trees and three nut trees (three representing the stages of the Hermetic process). The name Druid comes from the Greek word Drus meaning oak. An oak can represent the physical consciousness because the old trees usually grew in a hollow

that is similar to a cave, but the cave conceals a hidden treasure. The oak trees the Druids actually worshiped were not the 'physical ones' seen outside but the 'inner one' of which the spine was the trunk.

The wolf then decides to not just eat the grandmother (higher self) or Red Cap (lower self) and says, "I must act craftily so as to catch them both." This is the work of the conscious mind, which as soon as we try to do any process designed at lessening its grasp on us will do everything in its power to stay in control. The wolf suggests as he walks with Red Cap that she look at the beautiful flowers, birds and sunbeams (to spend time focusing on the outer physical world, the world of the conscious mind and to thus spend less time working on the inner mind). Red Cap thinks it would be nice to give her grandmother a flower and claimed "it is so early in the day that I should still get there in good time." This is typical of a new initiate who looks to take a break in the training or not focus as strongly with the work after a while. The new initiate may think there is 'lots' of time when in fact there is not. She ran from the path (stopped doing the work) and every time she picked a flower, she saw a more beautiful one and went deeper into the woods. This means she followed more closely the illusionary material world, going deeper and deeper into the darkness of the woods away from the light of the process. While she was focusing on the flowers (material world), the wolf (conscious mind) ran straight for the grandmother (higher self).

The wolf tricked his way in (as the conscious mind often plays tricks with us) and ate the grandmother and then put on her clothes and climbed into her bed. The changing into the grandmother's clothes is a metaphor that what we often think is our higher/spiritual self is actually the conscious mind in disguise. By going off the path "picking flowers" we will have a hard time recognizing if it is really our higher self or the conscious mind in disguise.

Red Cap has this exact problem when she gets to grandma's house and does not recognize the wolf, but notices the big ears, eyes, hands and mouth. This of course is four of the five senses (with taste being the wolf wanting to eat her), and are symbols for the way the conscious mind creates the illusion of the material world. There is an Absolute Reality beyond but when living through our senses as 99.9% of the world does, we will be unable to see True Reality instead living in a world of illusion (maya). Red Cap had fallen off the path, or she would have recognized the illusion. She could not and was eaten by the wolf.

A huntsman, one who hunts wolves (parts of us that attempt to destroy the conscious mind) hears the wolf asleep and snoring (mind not being used). He comes to the house (inner mind) and realizes the grandmother (high self) may have been eaten (had the link destroyed). The huntsman takes a pair of scissors and cuts open the stomach of the sleeping wolf. The scissors are like the sword, a cutting type of intense meditation needed to cut away the links of the conscious mind. With two cuts to the stomach, Red Cap comes out "shining" and says, "how dark it was inside the wolf" (in the control of the conscious mind). The grandmother then also appears out of the belly "barely able to breathe" signifying the inability to properly use the breath, a key to any mystical discipline. That she had come out of the darkness into light symbolized her creation of the astral body.

A number of stones were fetched and replaced in the wolf's belly and when he wanted to run away, the stones were so heavy that he collapsed at once and died (the conscious mind was brought down). The grandmother ate the cake and wine, cake being part of Egyptian initiation celebration later evolving to our birthday cakes. Red Cap now vowed to stay on the path "as long as I live, I will never by myself leave the path."

Yet, the story does not end there. Red Cap was again bringing cakes to her grandmother, but no vessel of wine (as she had created the elixir) when another wolf appeared. The wolf tried to "entice her from the path." This is important for all transformative disciplines tell us that just when we think we have our conscious mind in control, it will resurface with more vigor in one final attempt to win back control. Red Cap hurried past and went to Grandmother's house, thus stayed on the path. She was going to fight the conscious mind directly. The wolf was unable to enter through the shut door (the inner mind had been able to shut out the conscious).

With the wolf on the roof, grandmother has Red Cap fill a stone trough with sausage water with which she was cooking. The wolf sniffed the water and fell off the roof into the trough and drowns. Red Cap was joyous "and no one ever did anything to harm her again." She was now fully in control of her conscious mind and had done so by staying on the path using courage and effort, as we all will have to do to defeat the part of us that must go.

In an old French version of the tale the path of the material world that is symbolized by the flowers in Grimm's story is replaced by a choice. Here the wolf stands at a fork in the road and asks which road Red Cap wants to follow: pins or needles. This is a sewing reference of the way to repair a garment. The easy way is to use a pin to just tack it in place but it will not last long as a repair. To do it with needle and thread will do the job

right, but it will take considerable time and effort. Red Cap in the tale chooses the path of pins (the simple path, that of the ego and the material world). In other versions of the tale, Little Red Cap manages to escape the wolf using her cunning and intelligence. Instead of being eaten by the wolf in grandma's house, she recognizes its evil intentions (as all intentions of the conscious are evil) and forces the wolf to let go of her by claiming she needs to go outside and relieve herself.^{xii} This version never appears in modern stories.

It is the Perrault version from France where Red Cap's name has been changed to Little Red Riding Hood. It was Perrault who has also given us our awful modern version of Cinderella (see the following section) but does us no favours with this story. There is no rescue; Little Red Riding Hood simply dies. He omits most of the story such as key facts of Red Cap being warned to not stray off the path. He adds a moral to the end of the story, "Nice girls ought not listen to all sorts of people." A true Hermeticist would have no need for a moral, as the tale is not about the physical world but a metaphor of the journey of spiritual transformation. The story itself would provide the keys needed to unlock the doors of the work. With the addition of a moral, it is quite clear that Perrault is not passing on Hermetic wisdom. Perrault also puts his ideas in explicit detail. His is a story about sex. Riding Hood undresses in the house while the wolf tells her his strong arms are to better embrace her. Riding Hood also makes no attempt to escape or fight back. Thus is she naive, or wants to be seduced.^{xiii} Either way this is no heroine, the story is written by someone without the Hermetic keys to understand the oral version of the tales he was hearing and thus should be ignored by those on the path. Work with the other versions that still contain the ancient wisdom, usually with the Red Cap title.

Cinderella

The tale of Cinderella can be found in more languages and parts of the world than any other myth except that of Osiris and Isis. It is found in Europe, Asia, Africa, Middle East, and North and South America. Its widespread presence immediately shows the importance of the tale, for it has survived in so many ways around the world. Two of the earliest versions are the Egyptian story of Rhodopis and the 800 AD story from China of Yeh-h-sien.

Unfortunately the best known version is actually the most divergent of all the Cinderella stories. Our version, made famous by the Disney movie, comes from a book of fairy tales by Charles Perrault in the 1670's in France.^{xiv} Perrault was a member of the court of Louis XIV and wrote an odd version. Perrault also added moral, as he did with Red Cap. For this reason, the older versions that still contain the true wisdom will be examined. Learning the wisdom in the original tales will help you be able to look at the Perrault/Disney version to realize what key information was changed or left out.

The true Cinderella tales have common elements. Usually a young girl (but sometimes a boy) is persecuted and mistreated by their family. They receive some sort of magical help so they can be recognized for the good and beautiful person they are and marry the prince or princess. There is usually proof of identity, often by a shoe that is usually golden. A hearth and ashes (dirtiness of the main character) are common, as are helpful animals, a magic tree, three visits to a dance or church with three times running away, and Cinderella succeeding through intelligence and courage. Those familiar with the Perrault/Disney version will notice her shoe is made of glass (not gold), there are no magic trees, she only goes to the dance once, and Cinderella is not intelligent or courageous but whines and wishes for things.

Aschenputtel

We start with the oral version found in Grimms which "is closer to the European oral tradition than Perrault's tale."¹⁵ Grimms edited this version in their second published book but it is important to work with the original from 1812. The story starts with the death of a girl's mother who as she died promised to be with her always. When the father remarried the new wife brought two daughters with her. Her stepsisters were "fair to look upon, but dark and ugly in their hearts." The evil/ugly stepsisters are common to the Cinderella stories and they represent the physical and material world of duality that we live in. In truth there is only the Absolute but without wisdom we see the world in terms of opposites (high-low, good-bad, big-small, left-right, man-woman). Notice in most of the stories the stepsisters will always be concerned with physical reality.

The stepsisters wore good clothes, and gave the girl the old ugly ones and wooden shoes. They forced the girl to work in the kitchen and to do numerous chores. The girl had nowhere to sleep but the hearth among the ashes. We are told that because she was always dusty and dirty she was called Aschenputtel. A lot of information is provided here. The name Aschenputtel is a German word for a pot that sits in the fireplace. This

word ties in with the work she is forced to do in the kitchen. The heat represented here is the initial stage of the alchemical process that requires heat to break down the impure elements of the body to an ash. This blackened state, Nigredo or Calciniatio, is represented by the fact she must sleep in the hearth with the ashes thus becoming black. In our modern version her name is Cinderella, the cinders referring to the blackened state that must occur. This state requires a complete breakdown of our association with reality and who we think we are. In this story the breakdown is represented first by the death of the mother and then with the introduction of the stepsisters and stepmother. She works constantly without hope, a common experience of those going through Nigredo. Speaking from experience, Nigredo is a time of illness, depression and a complete overturning of who one thinks they are and what they think the world to be.

The father, before going to a fair, asks his children what they want him to bring back. The stepsisters want "fine clothes, jewels and pearls," all material elements of the dualistic physical world. Aschenputtel instead wants the first twig that strikes her father on the way home. She asks for something in the realm of nature, which is the first discipline learned in alchemy. What he brings for her is a hazel branch. Hazel is a type of wood that is symbolic of rebirth, thus will help in the rebirth of her dead mother and the girl's personal attachment to the spirit world. She plants the branch over the grave and cries, which causes the tree to grow through her tears. The second stage of the alchemic process is Dissolution or Solutio, where the element of water is used to work with the ash to clean it away. It does so by exposing the hidden emotions of the body, and involves the process of crying whereby we look at all of the hurts we are holding, finally to release them. Only then can we grow. The fact that the tree grows over the grave signifies that the gifts she will receive from this spot are beyond the physical world.

She sits under the tree three times a day (again the number of the process). A white bird comes to the tree and brings her whatever she asks for. The white dove is also a symbol of Albedo, which is also seen as the whitening whereby the black is purified by water to a pure white. The King announces a three day dance (notice it was three days) and all the beautiful women are invited. When Aschenputtel wants to go, her mother and stepsisters laugh. She is forced to pull lentils out of the ashes. With help from her magic birds she accomplishes the task, but over and over again the stepmother throws more lentils on the fire and Aschenputtel cries more and more each time. This is showing the length of time that can be involved in the process of Dissolution, with continued pain and work as more buried events come to the surface. Even though she completes the work, the stepmother and sisters leave for the dance without Aschenputtel. Picking the lentils out of the fire can also represent the stage of Separatio where one must separate out the negative parts of the being.

Aschenputtel asks for help from her mother's grave. The white bird provides a dress of gold and a pair of silver and silk slippers that gets Aschenputtel to the dance. At the ball, her own stepfamily does not recognize her. This is a key point of the story that is often overlooked. Why did they not recognize her? This is answered in the Cinderella tale of the Micmac Native Americans where only the heroine is able to "see" the Invisible One. Shamans call the ability to break free of illusion/maya as "seeing." The average person looks at things, but the shaman can see the real essence. We see a person or a table, but the shaman sees what something really is and can not be fooled by outer appearances. The stepfamily could not "see" Aschenputtel because they are of the physical world and have not gained wisdom to allow them to "see" the true identity of this new arrival.

The King's son dances with no one else saying to other men who ask, "No. She is my partner." This is referring to the step called Conjunction, where our male and female halves of our being must be brought together. At the end of the evening, the prince wants to see Aschenputtel home to know where she lives, but she runs away to hide in the dove's tree house. The tree (representing the chakras) is cut down to find no one inside the house. The father wonders if it had been his daughter, but finds Aschenputtel at home in her dirty clothes with an oil lamp burning in the chimney (again representing the work being done on the chakras). The entire scene repeats itself again, this time with Aschenputtel climbing up a pear tree after running from the dance. The Maya used the pear tree to represent the heart.

For the third dance Aschenputtel is given gold slippers by the magic birds. When she tries to run away this time, the prince places pitch (tar) all over the stairs that causes her right shoe to get stuck. The tar on the stairs may represent the dark matter in our subconscious which clings to the feet, thus making the path difficult for us to follow. It is also important that it is her right shoe that was lost and not the left. The right side is our active side, and losing this shoe would be taking away her forces of acting.

As in most of the Cinderella stories the shoes are made of gold, gold representing the final stage of the process or our astral body. Hermes is often shown in gold shoes with wings representing the golden astral body

that can travel anywhere. The shoe is always key to the story and often the prince or king never even meets Cinderella but only finds her shoe. The shoe is said to be small and slender and he promises to marry whomever it fits. The human foot, as is shown in reflexology, contains a connection with every part of the human body. A problem with the liver, bladder, or sore wrist can all be cured through the foot. For a spiritual adept the foot can be a representation of the whole person, and a shoe may create an imprint of the foot when worn. Thus for one who can psychically read such things, to have one's shoe would be enough to completely know everything about a person. This is why the prince or king (if an adept) would never need to meet the girl in person only to see her shoe.

In the Aschenputtel version, the prince searches far and wide for the shoe's owner. When he comes to the family's house the stepsisters are tried first. Often omitted in modern version is that the stepmother has the sisters cut off pieces of their feet to fit in the shoes. One cut of a toe for "when you are queen you will never have to walk again." The shoe fits the stepsister's foot but as the couple rides away two doves on the hazel tree tell the prince to look at the blood on the shoe. The shoe was not a perfect fit. The second sister cuts off a heel, but with the same result with help from the doves. The doves ask the prince both times to turn around and look behind him. This symbol is often displayed in medieval art with a person or animal turning around. It refers to the need for one to turn their gaze back on themselves and look with meditation and reflection at what they always believed to be the truth. The prince does this and sees the new truth that the shoes do not fit, thus the sisters are not the girl from the ball. This is an example of how we must look back on ourselves to find everything that is truly impure, even the things we have hidden from ourself or always found an excuse for.

Before Aschenputtel tries on the shoes, she washes her face and hands (another example of the continued purification). The golden shoe fits perfectly and the prince knows this is his bride. The astral body has been perfected and the wedding can now happen (the chemical wedding that all on the path are attempting to complete inside of ourselves). At the wedding the doves pluck out the eyes of the stepsisters thus guaranteeing they will never be able to "see" with the Eye of Horus. The tale mentions they "will go blind for the rest of their days" meaning they will never, due to their wickedness of their hearts, be able to "see the light." It is a final warning to all on the path to find purity of heart.

Pea D'Annisso/ Allerleirauh (many furred creature)

Two similar tales, one from France and Germany, are reviewed together. As a note, the German version seems to hold more specific information and will be the main focus of this section. These are very old tales, older than the Perrault version and perhaps the Grimm version. The storyline is unique and often not found in fairy tale books. The main reason that the tales are omitted from most books is because the tale begins with the father wanting to marry his daughter, our Cinderella heroine.

In both stories a man's beautiful wife dies and makes him promise not to marry again unless he finds someone as beautiful as her. The German edition adds she should also have the mother's golden (astral) hair. As the unnamed daughter grows up she begins to look more and more like her deceased mother, so the father decided she is the one he should marry. She uses her cunning in the German version to ask for three dresses (for the three Hermetic stages), one each of the sun, moon and stars. In the French version our heroine does little for herself and asks for help from her fairy godmother (a representation of spirit guides or guardian angels), who tells the child to ask her father for special dresses.

The heroine is ready to run away once she has the three dresses and demands also a special cloak made out of a thousand animals. The animals are representative of the powers of nature that one must grasp and understand: the animal, plant, elemental kingdoms needed to secure help in the spiritual realm. Alchemists like Nicholas Flamel claimed that if one did not first study nature and her process, one could not even begin alchemy. The French version condenses all of this into the fairy godmother, much less solid symbolism. When she is ready to run away (lose her identity) she takes three treasures (a golden ring, spinning wheel and reel), the dresses and the cloak. She then commands herself to God (prays or meditates) and travels the whole night (time for going inward to quiet of the mind). Eventually she comes to a forest (symbolic of the dark place we must travel through on our meditative journey), sits down inside a hollow tree and falls asleep (went inside and meditates). The French version has the godmother giving the girl a chest that can go underground (or to the inner depths of the mind), a magic wand, and a donkey skin (pea d'Annisso) which is similar to the animal skin of the German version. She also flees during the night (the time of quiet and meditation).

We find the girl in the German version sleeps until noon (the time of the most heat from the sun, or inner

fire) just as the King's hunting party finds her. The party brings her back to work in the kitchen (again the heat) and sweeping the ashes (the blackening of Nigredo). In the French version, she comes to the home of a noble family. In symbolic terms a noble refers to a Hermetic initiate. Thus she comes to those of wisdom who hire her as a turkey girl, doing the hard and dirty work of cleaning out the stables. This is similar to sleeping in the hearth with the ashes as she is blackening in Nigredo. When asked what her skill is she says she can make the most beautiful lace in the world. Lace is a symbol connected to the loom or weaving apparatus. Lace represents the web of life, the interconnected strands that bind all of creation together. The German version uses the spinning wheel and reel, which represents wool or string. She is given a room to sleep but often sleeps in the corner of the hearth, symbolizing a warming heat similar to what is found in the stage of Separatio. Every evening the girl opens the chest to look at her beautiful dresses, wash herself (purify) and comb her hair (which separates the hairs, then brings it back together).

In the German version there is a great feast, to which she manages to sneak into after taking off her animal cloak and washing her face and hands (like in the French version). She let her "beauty shine forth as if one sunbeam after another were coming out of a black cloud." She goes to the feast in her gold dress of the sun and dances with the King. Afterwards, she runs back to her room, puts on her animal skin and dirties herself so as to be unnoticed.

In the French version, a prince comes by the stables and insults her with a poker, bellows and a stick. The poker and the bellows are both famed symbolic tools of the alchemist, working in the furnace of the lower energy source of the body (called the Dan Tien by Taoist Qi Gong and Tai Qi masters). When the girl finds there is to be a ball she opens the chest (inner mind) and puts on one of the dresses. The chest takes her underground to where the ball was taking place (journey to the inner self). The prince dances with her. The next day she was teased and shamed by the prince. The average reader will think the prince in the story is a bad person, and may wonder why our heroine wants such a terrible person, and why he does not apologize. However, if the prince is a symbol of a true master, then the depiction is accurate. A master knows all of our weak points, and our ways of keeping the ego in place, thus can play a very nasty game with us to dethrone our self-importance. When one has no self importance left, one does not care what others think of them.

Eventually the prince becomes ill, and while in bed (immobile and able to use the inner subconscious mind) he begins to wonder if his beautiful girl and the turkey girl (Pea D'Annisso) were connected. So worried he becomes that he did not eat anything (he fasts) and claims he will only eat soup made by Pea. The soup is representative of the elixir of life, of feeding the soul. To make the soup Pea washes herself (purifies), combs her hair and puts on her loveliest dress "so as to be clean when she made the soup." Thus one cannot make the elixir of life while one is impure and not gone through the purification process. Pea brings the soup to the prince, who sees her shine like gold (her astral body). She no longer wears her donkey skin and they were married.

In the end of the German version the maiden is forced by the cook to make the King's soup (same as above), but she places the gold ring in it. At the second feast she wears her silver dress (showing she first works on solar male energy and now she is working on lunar feminine energy). In the soup she placed the spinning wheel. For the third dance she wears the star dress, but while dancing the King places the ring on her finger (this is the equivalent of the shoe as identification). She stays too late (a common feature of the Cinderella tale) and does not have time to change out of her dress; she covers it up with her cloak. When she brings the soup the final time with the gold reel in the soup, the King finds the reel, sees the ring on her finger (proof of identity) then removes the cloak to see the dress. She was now in her full splendor "and could not hide herself anymore" referring to her newly formed astral body. The king marries her and they live happily ever after.

Yeh-h-sien

This Chinese version is the oldest known complete Cinderella story still in print, recorded around 800 AD. Here the father is a cavemaster (a name used for wise one). Eventually both the father and mother die but our heroine is brought up by the cavemaster's second wife. The references to collecting firewood in dangerous places and drawing water from deep pools are of the alchemic stages of Nigredo/Calcinatio and Dissolution. The fish she catches has red fins and gold eyes representing the final stages of the process.

We are later told Yeh-h-sien has to go to a spring that is far away, a long hard journey. The fish itself is ten feet long (ten the number of completion). The stepmothers cut off the fish's head (ego consciousness), and the fish bones are hidden under a dung hill, meaning gold will be found where you don't expect it - in our own

lead. After help from above Yeh-h-sien is able to locate the fish bones, who give her everything she needs.

Instead of a ball, the other sisters are invited to the cave festival while our heroine watches the fruit trees in the garden. She follows in a cloak of kingfisher feathers and shoes of gold, but she runs away losing the famous shoe. The king has every maiden in the land try on the shoe but it fits no one as it is, "so light it made no noise even when treading on stone." This is a reference to the quiet of meditation, and the stone is what blocks and hides the inner mind.

Interestingly, this story ends with the king using the fish bones to grant him riches. When they no longer do so he buries them along the seashore and covers them with 100 bushes of pears, showing he was not using the heart when asking for wishes, but the mind. The sisters and mother die after being hit by flying rocks.

Billy Beg and the Bull

Interestingly the Cinderella story that seems to have the most Hermetic wisdom hidden in it comes from Ireland, and has a boy instead of a girl as the hero. A male Cinderella usually wins a princess by being a giant killer or dragon slayer. The serpent has two meanings shown in Egypt, one as Apop (the slithering conscious mind) while the other serpent gains wings (the rising serpent kundalini which leads to enlightened wisdom). The dragon in these stories are a representation of Apop. This tale has tremendous depth, and only a few key aspects will be explored in this commentary. This is a story of the number nine. It appears in the beginning of the tale when the bull leaps nine miles high, nine miles deep and nine miles broad. The number appears at the end of the story by claiming the wedding lasts nine days, nine hours, nine minutes etc. Nine is the number of Osiris and is the number of cycles and regeneration. Thus this Cinderella story explains the regeneration of nature.

From the bull's left ear, Billy is able to find things that will bring him food and nourishment. The left side of the body is the feminine side or yin, the side of Mother Earth that provides for our receptive needs. The right side is male or yang, and from this ear Billy pulls a magic stick that will give him tremendous strength. The stick is a symbol of the male element of action. There are many fights between bulls that result in blood. The bull is a representation of male sexual energy, with the blood representing the concentrated power of meditation or in this case the power to gain control of one's sexual energy. The bull is eventually defeated by the black bull, symbolizing the ego and Nigredo, the first stage of the process. Billy spent the time after the death not drinking or eating (fasting), and cries salt tears. The tears of salt are representative of the second stage dissolution, where we destroy our emotional salt blocks in the body and release them in our tears. Tears contain salt that the ancient alchemists believed were remnants of the actual solid blocks in the etheric body.

It is suggested to read the story with a dictionary for a number of words in the tale can provide different insights into the wisdom when using alternate meanings. When Billy is to fight the giants they ask, "swing by the back, cut of the sword, or square round of boxing." To "swing" is to lift up with a swinging motion, but it can also mean to change one's opinion. The back can be a term for that which is less seen or less used. Thus a swing by the back can mean to change the opinion of the subconscious mind, which is rarely seen and remains hidden. Being a Hermeticist, Billy chooses this option. He drives the giant into the earth with only the heads above ground (another example of where the process is focused) and cuts out the tongue, a reminder to remain silent in meditation and gain inner wisdom and also to remain silent about the actual methods of the process.

When asked if he saw the giant Billy replies, "nothing worse nor myself." This can be re-stated in our language as "nothing worse than myself" signifying that the giant he fights in the physical world is simply a manifestation of the giant inside. This is a key component of ancient funerary literature such as the Tibetan or Egyptian Books of the Dead. It speaks of the horrible creatures that we will have to face of the journey after death. Yet they also let you know that all the creatures are only manifestations of the creatures inside each one of us. By eliminating the negative aspect of ourselves, the monster outside will go away.

Interestingly, the most important line of the entire story is the last. Most tales end with the words 'happily ever after.' This tale could easily end with the second last line of this story with the happy wedding. However this tale adds one more significant line, "I got brogues of porridge and breeches of glass, a bit of pie for telling a lie, and then I came slithering home." The line intrigued fellow Hermeticist friend Darren Loudfoot so we studied it some more. The line "I came slithering home" makes reference to a serpent and it is likely referring to the narrator of the story. Thus the narrator of the story is a serpent. The serpent or snake is a sign of hidden wisdom in the ancient world, and with the serpent narrating the story reveals that this tale is full of hidden wisdom.

The remainder off the last line has been studied with the use of a dictionary for "brogues of porridge and

breeches of glass” made no sense on the surface. The dictionary informed that a brogue is an Irish dialect or a strong ornamental shoe. Porridge is the oatmeal food we think of, or a term for imprisonment. Thus Billy was imprisoned in strong shoes. Breeches are riding trousers worn just below the knee, while glass is transparent. The line may be telling that he is imprisoned or focused only on the strong shoes, or the path of wisdom. He wears breeches made of glass so if you look beyond the outer material you see his legs (the inner usually hidden). His bit of pie can mean he offers us a small part of the hidden wisdom (as the good part of the pie is hidden beneath the crust). By saying he is telling a lie could be a warning that some part of the story was not the truth and it is up to the reader through training to understand which part is a lie.

As you can see from this short explanation of this tale that it is a great source of wisdom and should be read with a dictionary to find further wisdom is hidden within the word play.

The Ugly Duckling

The ugly duckling is truly a story of esoteric and alchemic wisdom. The story immediately points to its Egyptian roots. The tale begins with storks who “walked on their long red legs talking Egyptian because that was the language they had been taught by their mothers.” The stork is a version of the ibis, the great bird of Tehuti. The mention of the Egyptian language at the beginning of a Danish tale alerts our readers right away to what will be forthcoming, some of the hidden Hermetic wisdom of Thoth.

Before we even meet the newborn duck, we are told of a setting full of woods (places where it is dark and difficult to navigate through like the process of wisdom the initiate will undertake). The area has a number of hidden pools and lakes (water referring to the power of meditative reflection to look at the self and know thyself). In a forest between a moat and a castle are stalks so high that a child could stand upright under them and imagine that they were in the middle of the woods. The child symbolizes one at the beginning of the journey (as the wise master is depicted as being elderly). The high stalks show the process to be worked on will be high up, the head and mind. Also the mention of imagination is made. Alchemists see this as part of what they call the prima materia or first matter. A child will use their imagination, but as adults we lose this ability. It is the imagination which allows us to connect to the realm of spirit above.

The mother duck builds her nest in this place and sits with her eggs “feeling sorry for herself because it was taking so long and nobody came to visit her.” This statement is explaining the initial steps in the process. With no one coming to visit, it would be quiet thus a perfect time for meditative practice. There is also reference to the length of time it takes. Personal transformation is a long, hard process, no matter what the new age seminars say. You will not be transformed or ready to heal after taking a weekend course. The process will take your full effort for a long time, and you will have to confront your inner demons that most would rather not admit to having. Most would rather be like the other ducks that “preferred swimming in the moat, or gossiping, opposed to being quiet in meditation.”

All of the eggs hatch except for one. The mother is tired and asks for help and an old duck comes to help her but simply says it is a turkey egg. He tells the mother to forget about it and go ahead in life with the others. This is actually the ego talking. When we begin the steps to transformation we will see some small successes but often the big ones are right around the corner. The ego is afraid of relinquishing total control of our being, so it tries everything to trick us into stopping our work. It does not want us to continue to our goal, the complete destruction of itself. So here the duck tells the mother to forget the egg and go on. The mother however decides that she has put in this much effort, she can afford a little more. This is a wise message for all of us to keep putting in the effort.

Sure enough the egg hatches, but the duckling is deemed to be ugly and not like the other ducks. That one is not like the others is a clear reference to one who begins following a mystery/spiritual path. They begin to realize that they are not like the rest of the people in the world who are only interested in the physical and the material. In many versions the duckling is shown as black. Black is the first stage of the alchemic process, Nigredo or Calcinatio. Here we seek to use fire on ourselves as we find what is impure in our make up and burn ourselves down to a black ash that will be worked with in the later stages as in the early parts of Cinderella. This is a tortuous time as one has to undercover most of their shadow elements, impure thoughts and most awful experiences of life. What is not looked at here gets looked at in future stages. This difficult time is echoed in the Ugly Duckling.

A mention is made of families of ducks who get into a fight over the head of an eel. The eel, like the snake, is slippery and moves about all over like the thoughts of our conscious mind. The mind needs to attain a

stillness to gain wisdom. The fight is over the head, a direct reference to the mind, but the cat swipes it. In the Egyptian Papyrus of Ani (what we call the Book of the Dead) the cat (powers of feminine reflection) cuts off the head of the serpent Apop, the archenemy of the sun god Ra. Apop keeps us from the light by the moving conscious thoughts in our mind. The cat, representing feminine meditation, is able to cut off the head of the serpent (our thoughts) to allow stillness and the emergence of the light.

The other ducks began to tease the ugly duck mercilessly “look how ugly he is...he’s big and doesn’t look like everyone else and that is reason enough to beat him.” Eventually even his own mother wants the ugly duckling to go away. As mentioned, the initial black stage of the process is a very difficult one. One must follow a special path to wisdom while the rest of the world is following the path of physical gratification. To be different than the rest is to be attacked by the rest for being an outcast. Even family and friends are likely to mock one who follows a true spiritual calling.

Finally the duckling has enough of the insults and attacks that he runs away to be alone and “closed his eyes.” This act represents not only the need to be alone so as to meditate properly (with the eyes closed to take the focus off the material world), but is also the fact that one has to be strong and eventually will have to stop spending time with the general uninitiated population. Spiritual advancement depends on it.

The duckling winds up in a swamp where wild ducks live. They admit he is ugly but invite him along anyway (for his initial work had shown he had some of the wisdom). While in the swamp he meets two male ganders. They represent those on the material path for they want the duckling to come with them to go meet some “beautiful wild geese.” Almost immediately a hunter kills the two ganders. This is showing what happens if one on the spiritual path gives into the temptations of the physical world. The fact that they are killed is another representation that they are of the physical and will die in the physical.

At this point, dogs come running (the barking mind that must be tamed) and they bare their teeth. Shamans warn that while on a journey if one sees a spirit animal bear their teeth they should be avoided. The duckling does just that, hiding and laying very still (in a deep meditation) and the dogs quietly turn away. The duckling manages to still the mind and overcome physical temptation. As he runs away a wind comes up that nearly stops his progress, symbolic of that which will come up to try and keep us from continuing on the path of wisdom.

The duckling finds an old hut where an old woman lives with a hen and a cat. This may represent finding a temple or teachers. The fact that the duckling has gone through tremendous hardship and work shows that the duck was ready for more advanced teachings. While there the duck thinks he should be allowed to have a different opinion than the other housemates. The woman gets angry and asks if he could lay eggs like the hen or make sparks like the cat. When the duck replies no he is told to “keep your mouth shut, you have no right to opinion when sensible people are talking.”

If the hut represents a temple environment this line would make sense. When the student is first working with masters they usually must take a vow of silence, so they can spend their time listening to the wisdom of the teacher. The duckling was asked if he could perform the feats of the other initiates in training, symbolized by the animals in the house. When the duckling said he could not, the masters were in a sense telling him to shut up and listen to the sources of wisdom so that he might learn to have the power the other students have gained. As long as he is talking about his own ideas he cannot learn the truth from the masters. The old woman replies, “that’s the truth and I am only telling you for your own good.” That is how you recognize a true friend: it is someone who is willing to tell you the truth no matter how unpleasant it may seem at the time. This is also a true master, who loves their pupils so much that they will show them the truth of the universe and themselves, often which is terrifying and unpleasant. One has to realize the master is doing this for our benefit because they want us to experience universal truth and find out what inside of us truly needs to be transformed.

The duck finally leaves (after likely acquiring a large amount of wisdom) and comes to another lake. A raven (another black sign of Nigredo) looks at the duckling and says, “what a terrible time the duckling must have had.” The raven is speaking of the hell that the duck must have gone through, but is also referring to the fact that he is close to making it to the next white stage. The lake here may refer to the white stage of dissolution and Albedo, a purification of the black ash by white water.

Just then the duckling sees swans (the white birds) that are flying south for the winter. This is showing that the duckling is not yet at the white stage, but birds that fly south for the winter, fly back next spring. As the weather grew colder the duck keeps swimming in circles, perhaps representing the fact that we constantly are given lessons but as we usually don’t learn them. We come right back full circle again repeating our old habits

and patterns. The hole in the ice keeps getting smaller until finally he is too tired to swim and sat still, for his patterns finally took him no where. The ice comes around and freezes him solid. Thus when we finally stop running in circles to stare our lesson right in the face, we are often overcome by it.

A farmer (one who grows things and transforms seeds) frees the duckling with his shoe and takes the bird to his wife who brings the “duckling back to life.” After seeing and fully integrating the lesson, we are ready to let go of it and the part of us that was not allowing us to move past it. While with the farmer the duckling flew into a milk pail and into flour, both white and representative of the stage of dissolution or Albedo and the whitening purification taking place at this stage.

Finally spring comes and the swans return. The duckling now has “strong and powerful wings,” reference to the power and knowledge gained. Yet the duckling finally decides to let the swans kill him, meaning he is finally ready to sacrifice his old self (the ruling ego) and allow the ego to be killed. “Kill me,” he whispers to the swan.

At this point the duckling looks into the water and sees that he is actually a swan himself (an initiate). The process had happened some time ago but he had not yet noticed the actual change. “He was thankful that he had known so much want and gone through so much suffering, for it made him appreciate his present happiness and the loveliness of everything about him all the more.” A perfect thing to say by someone who reaches “unity with the All.”

Children then run out shouting, “look, there is a new one,” as the priests would announce a new initiate to the group. Cakes and bread were cast on the lake for the swans, cake being an Egyptian symbol of the end of an initiation process that over time became our traditional birthday cake.

Perhaps the examinations of these three famous tales will bring you to explore them in more detail, and to examine other tales like: Snow White, Aladdin’s Lamp, Jack in the Beanstalk and Puss and Boots. Do not forget as well the hundreds of little known tales that carry as much, if not more wisdom than the current most popular stories. The most profound fairy tale that I have found is *Alice in Wonderland*. That book contains elements of shamanism, Zen Buddhism as well as other traditions. Working with the wisdom of the fairy tale can only help your advancement as an adept.

- ⁱ Feuerstein, Geor and Kak, Subbash and Frawley, David *In Search of the Cradle of Civilization* (Quest Books 1995) p. 95
- ⁱⁱ Bettelheim, Bruno *The Uses of Enchantment* (Alfred A Knopf 1989) p.5
- ⁱⁱⁱ West, *Serpent* p. 127
- ^{iv} Hauck p.368; West *Serpent* p.147
- ^v Grimm Brothers *Complete Grimm's Fairy Tales* (Partheon Books 1944) p.viii
- ^{vi} Sierra, Judy *Cinderella* (Oryx Press 1992) p.164
- ^{vii} Dumas, Alan ed *Cinderella a Casebook* (University of Wisconsin Press 1982) pp. 298-300
- ^{viii} West *Serpent* p.149
- ^{ix} West *Serpent* p.147
- ^x Ashby *Ausarian* p.25
- ^{xi} A great teaching tool for the Hermetic wisdom I discuss in all of the tales is found in Norville, Roy *Hermes Unveiled*
- ^{xii} Bettelheim p.171, Sierra p.164
- ^{xiii} Bettelheim pp.168-69
- ^{xiv} Sierra p.161
15Sierra p.151

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