

THE USES OF ENCHANTMENT

The Meaning and Importance
of Fairy Tales

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those who have done something really bad get destroyed, the fable seems to teach that it is wrong to enjoy life when it is good, as in summer. Even worse, the ant in this fable is a nasty animal, without any compassion for the suffering of the grasshopper—and this is the figure the child is asked to take for his example.

The wolf, on the contrary, is obviously a bad animal, because it wants to destroy. The wolf's badness is something the young child recognizes within himself: his wish to devour, and its consequence—the anxiety about possibly suffering such a fate himself. So the wolf is an externalization, a projection of the child's badness—and the story tells how this can be dealt with constructively.

The various excursions in which the oldest pig gets food in good ways are an easily neglected but significant part of the story, because they show that there is a world of difference between eating and devouring. The child subconsciously understands it as the difference between the pleasure principle uncontrolled, when one wants to devour all at once, ignoring the consequences, and the reality principle, in line with which one goes about intelligently foraging for food. The mature pig gets up in good time to bring the goodies home before the wolf appears on the scene. What better demonstration of the value of acting on the basis of the reality principle, and what it consists of, than the pig's rising very early in the morning to secure the delicious food and, in so doing, foiling the wolf's evil designs?

In fairy tales it is typically the youngest child who, although at first thought little of or scorned, turns out to be victorious in the end. "The Three Little Pigs" deviates from this pattern, since it is the oldest pig who is superior to the two little pigs all along. An explanation can be found in the fact that all three pigs are "little," thus immature, as is the child himself. The child identifies with each of them in turn and recognizes the progression of identity. "The Three Little Pigs" is a fairy tale because of its happy ending, and because the wolf gets what he deserves.

While the child's sense of justice is offended by the poor grasshopper having to starve although it did nothing bad, his feeling of fairness is satisfied by the punishment of the wolf. Since the three little pigs represent stages in the development of man, the disappearance of the first two little pigs is not traumatic; the child understands subconsciously that we have to shed earlier forms of existence if we wish to move on to higher ones. In talking to young children about "The Three Little Pigs," one encounters only rejoicing about the deserved punishment of the wolf and the clever victory of the oldest pig—not

grief over the fate of the two little ones. Even a young child seems to understand that all three are really one and the same in different stages—which is suggested by their answering the wolf in exactly the same words: "No, no, not by the hair of my chinni-chin-chin!" If we survive in only the higher form of our identity, this is as it should be.

"The Three Little Pigs" directs the child's thinking about his own development without ever telling what it ought to be, permitting the child to draw his own conclusions. This process alone makes for true maturing, while telling the child what to do just replaces the bondage of his own immaturity with a bondage of servitude to the dicta of adults.

THE CHILD'S NEED FOR MAGIC

Myths and fairy stories both answer the eternal questions: What is the world really like? How am I to live my life in it? How can I truly be myself? The answers given by myths are definite, while the fairy tale is suggestive; its messages may imply solutions, but it never spells them out. Fairy tales leave to the child's fantasizing whether and how to apply to himself what the story reveals about life and human nature.

The fairy tale proceeds in a manner which conforms to the way a child thinks and experiences the world; this is why the fairy tale is so convincing to him. He can gain much better solace from a fairy tale than he can from an effort to comfort him based on adult reasoning and viewpoints. A child trusts what the fairy story tells, because its world view accords with his own.

Whatever our age, only a story conforming to the principles underlying our thought processes carries conviction for us. If this is so for adults, who have learned to accept that there is more than one frame of reference for comprehending the world—although we find it difficult if not impossible truly to think in any but our own—it is exclusively true for the child. His thinking is animistic.

Like all preliterate and many literate people, "the child assumes that his relations to the inanimate world are of one pattern with those to the animate world of people: he fondles as he would his mother the

pretty thing that pleased him; he strikes the door that has slammed on him."¹⁴ It should be added that he does the first because he is convinced that this pretty thing loves to be petted as much as he does; and he punishes the door because he is certain that the door slammed deliberately, out of evil intention.

As Piaget has shown, the child's thinking remains animistic until the age of puberty. His parents and teachers tell him that things cannot feel and act; and as much as he may pretend to believe this to please these adults, or not to be ridiculed, deep down the child knows better. Subjected to the rational teachings of others, the child only buries his "true knowledge" deeper in his soul and it remains untouched by rationality; but it can be formed and informed by what fairy tales have to say.

To the eight-year-old (to quote Piaget's examples), the sun is alive because it gives light (and, one may add, it does that because it wants to). To the child's animistic mind, the stone is alive because it can move, as it rolls down a hill. Even a twelve-and-a-half-year-old is convinced that a stream is alive and has a will, because its water is flowing. The sun, the stone, and the water are believed to be inhabited by spirits very much like people, so they feel and act like people.¹⁵

To the child, there is no clear line separating objects from living things; and whatever has life has life very much like our own. If we do not understand what rocks and trees and animals have to tell us, the reason is that we are not sufficiently attuned to them. To the child trying to understand the world, it seems reasonable to expect answers from those objects which arouse his curiosity. And since the child is self-centered, he expects the animal to talk about the things which are really significant to him, as animals do in fairy tales, and as the child himself talks to his real or toy animals. A child is convinced that the animal understands and feels with him, even though it does not show it openly.

Since animals roam freely and widely in the world, how natural that in fairy tales these animals are able to guide the hero in his search which takes him into distant places. Since all that moves is alive, the child can believe that the wind can talk and carry the hero to where he needs to go, as in "East of the Sun and West of the Moon."¹⁶ In animistic thinking, not only animals feel and think as we do, but even stones are alive; so to be turned into stone simply means that the being has to remain silent and unmoving for a time. By the same reasoning, it is entirely believable when previously silent objects begin to talk, give advice, and join the hero on his wanderings. And since every-

thing is inhabited by a spirit similar to all other spirits (namely, that of the child who has projected his spirit into all these things), because of this inherent sameness it is believable that man can change into animal, or the other way around, as in "Beauty and the Beast" or "The Frog King."¹⁷ Since there is no sharp line drawn between living and dead things, the latter, too, can come to life.

When, like the great philosophers, children are searching for the solutions to the first and last questions—"Who am I? How ought I to deal with life's problems? What must I become?"—they do so on the basis of their animistic thinking. But since the child is so uncertain of what his existence consists, first and foremost comes the question "Who am I?"

As soon as a child begins to move about and explore, he begins to ponder the problem of his identity. When he spies his mirror image, he wonders whether what he sees is really he, or a child just like him standing behind this glassy wall. He tries to find out by exploring whether this other child is really, in all ways, like him. He makes faces, turns this way or that, walks away from the mirror and jumps back in front of it to ascertain whether this other one has moved away or is still there. Though only three years old, the child is already up against the difficult problem of personal identity.

The child asks himself: "Who am I? Where did I come from? How did the world come into being? Who created man and all the animals? What is the purpose of life?" True, he ponders these vital questions not in the abstract, but mainly as they pertain to him. He worries not whether there is justice for individual man, but whether *he* will be treated justly. He wonders who or what projects him into adversity, and what can prevent this from happening to him. Are there benevolent powers in addition to his parents? Are his parents benevolent powers? How should he form himself, and why? Is there hope for him, though he may have done wrong? Why has all this happened to him? What will it mean for his future? Fairy tales provide answers to these pressing questions, many of which the child becomes aware of only as he follows the stories.

From an adult point of view and in terms of modern science, the answers which fairy stories offer are fantastic rather than true. As a matter of fact, these solutions seem so incorrect to many adults—who have become estranged from the ways in which young people experience the world—that they object to exposing children to such "false" information. However, realistic explanations are usually incomprehensible to children, because they lack the abstract understanding

required to make sense of them. While giving a scientifically correct answer makes adults think they have clarified things for the child, such explanations leave the young child confused, overpowered, and intellectually defeated. A child can derive security only from the conviction that he understands now what baffled him before—never from being given facts which create *new* uncertainties. Even as the child accepts such an answer, he comes to doubt that he has asked the right question. Since the explanation fails to make sense to him, it must apply to some unknown problem—not the one he asked about.

It is therefore important to remember that only statements which are intelligible in terms of the child's existing knowledge and emotional preoccupations carry conviction for him. To tell a child that the earth floats in space, attracted by gravity into circling around the sun, but that the earth doesn't fall to the sun as the child falls to the ground, seems very confusing to him. The child knows from his experience that everything has to rest on something, or be held up by something. Only an explanation based on that knowledge can make him feel he understands better about the earth in space. More important, to feel secure on earth, the child needs to believe that this world is held firmly in place. Therefore he finds a better explanation in a myth that tells him that the earth rests on a turtle, or is held up by a giant.

If a child accepts as true what his parents tell him—that the earth is a planet held securely on its path by gravity—then the child can only imagine that gravity is a string. Thus the parents' explanation has led to no better understanding or feeling of security. It requires considerable intellectual maturity to believe that there can be stability to one's life when the ground on which one walks (the firmest thing around, on which everything rests) spins with incredible speed on an invisible axis; that in addition it rotates around the sun; and furthermore hurtles through space with the entire solar system. I have never yet encountered a prepubertal youngster who could comprehend all these combined movements, although I have known many who could repeat this information. Such children parrot explanations which according to their own experience of the world are lies, but which they must believe to be true because some adult has said so. The consequence is that children come to distrust their own experience, and therefore themselves and what their minds can do for them.

In the fall of 1973, the comet Kohoutek was in the news. At that time a competent science teacher explained the comet to a small group of highly intelligent second- and third-graders. Each child had carefully cut out a paper circle and had drawn on it the course of the planets

around the sun; a paper ellipse, attached by a slit to the paper circle, represented the course of the comet. The children showed me the comet moving along at an angle to the planets. When I asked them, the children told me that they were holding the comet in their hands, showing me the ellipse. When I asked how the comet which they were holding in their hands could also be in the sky, they were all nonplussed.

In their confusion, they turned to their teacher, who carefully explained to them that what they were holding in their hands, and had so diligently created, was only a model of the planets and the comet. The children all agreed that they understood this, and would have repeated it if questioned further. But whereas before they had regarded proudly this circle-cum-ellipse in their hands, they now lost all interest. Some crumpled the paper up, others dropped the model in the wastepaper basket. When the pieces of paper had been the comet to them, they had all planned to take the model home to show their parents, but now it no longer had meaning for them.

In trying to get a child to accept scientifically correct explanations, parents all too frequently discount scientific findings of how a child's mind works. Research on the child's mental processes, especially Piaget's, convincingly demonstrates that the young child is not able to comprehend the two vital abstract concepts of the permanence of quantity, and of reversibility—for instance, that the same quantity of water rises high in a narrow receptacle and remains low in a wide one; and that subtraction reverses the process of addition. Until he can understand abstract concepts such as these, the child can experience the world only subjectively.¹⁸

Scientific explanations require objective thinking. Both theoretical research and experimental exploration have shown that no child below school age is truly able to grasp these two concepts, without which abstract understanding is impossible. In his early years, until age eight or ten, the child can develop only highly personalized concepts about what he experiences. Therefore it seems natural to him, since the plants which grow on this earth nourish him as his mother did from her breast, to see the earth as a mother or a female god, or at least as her abode.

Even a young child somehow knows that he was created by his parents; so it makes good sense to him that, like himself, all men and where they live were created by a superhuman figure not very different from his parents—some male or female god. Since his parents watch over the child and provide him with his needs in his home, then

naturally he also believes that something like them, only much more powerful, intelligent, and reliable—a guardian angel—will do so out in the world.

A child thus experiences the world order in the image of his parents and of what goes on within the family. The ancient Egyptians, as a child does, saw heaven and the sky as a motherly figure (Nut) who protectively bent over the earth, enveloping it and them serenely.¹⁹ Far from preventing man from later developing a more rational explanation of the world, such a view offers security where and when it is most needed—a security which, when the time is ripe, allows for a truly rational world view. Life on a small planet surrounded by limitless space seems awfully lonely and cold to a child—just the opposite of what he knows life ought to be. This is why the ancients needed to feel sheltered and warmed by an enveloping mother figure. To depreciate protective imagery like this as mere childish projections of an immature mind is to rob the young child of one aspect of the prolonged safety and comfort he needs.

True, the notion of a sheltering sky-mother can be limiting to the mind if clung to for too long. Neither infantile projections nor dependence on imaginary protectors—such as a guardian angel who watches out for one when one is asleep, or during Mother's absence—offers true security; but as long as one cannot provide complete security for oneself, imaginings and projections are far preferable to no security. It is such (partly imagined) security which, when experienced for a sufficient length of time, permits the child to develop that feeling of confidence in life which he needs in order to trust himself—a trust necessary for his learning to solve life's problems through his own growing rational abilities. Eventually the child recognizes that what he has taken as literally true—the earth as a mother—is only a symbol.

A child, for example, who has learned from fairy stories to believe that what at first seemed a repulsive, threatening figure can magically change into a most helpful friend is ready to believe that a strange child whom he meets and fears may also be changed from a menace into a desirable companion. Belief in the "truth" of the fairy tale gives him courage not to withdraw because of the way this stranger appears to him at first. Recalling how the hero of many a fairy tale succeeded in life because he dared to befriend a seemingly unpleasant figure, the child believes he may work the same magic.

I have known many examples where, particularly in late adolescence, years of belief in magic are called upon to compensate for the

person's having been deprived of it prematurely in childhood, through stark reality having been forced on him. It is as if these young people feel that now is their last chance to make up for a severe deficiency in their life experience; or that without having had a period of belief in magic, they will be unable to meet the rigors of adult life. Many young people who today suddenly seek escape in drug-induced dreams, apprentice themselves to some guru, believe in astrology, engage in practicing "black magic," or who in some other fashion escape from reality into daydreams about magic experiences which are to change their life for the better, were prematurely pressed to view reality in an adult way. Trying to evade reality in such ways has its deeper cause in early formative experiences which prevented the development of the conviction that life can be mastered in realistic ways.

What seems desirable for the individual is to repeat in his life span the process involved historically in the genesis of scientific thought. For a long time in his history man used emotional projections—such as gods—born of his immature hopes and anxieties to explain man, his society, and the universe; these explanations gave him a feeling of security. Then slowly, by his own social, scientific, and technological progress, man freed himself of the constant fear for his very existence. Feeling more secure in the world, and also within himself, man could now begin to question the validity of the images he had used in the past as explanatory tools. From there man's "childish" projections dissolved and more rational explanations took their place. This process, however, is by no means without vagaries. In intervening periods of stress and scarcity, man seeks for comfort again in the "childish" notion that he and his place of abode are the center of the universe.

Translated in terms of human behavior, the more secure a person feels within the world, the less he will need to hold on to "infantile" projections—mythical explanations or fairy-tale solutions to life's eternal problems—and the more he can afford to seek rational explanations. The more secure a man is within himself, the more he can afford to accept an explanation which says his world is of minor significance in the cosmos. Once man feels truly significant in his human environment, he cares little about the importance of his planet within the universe. On the other hand, the more insecure a man is in himself and his place in the immediate world, the more he withdraws into himself because of fear, or else moves outward to conquer for conquest's sake. This is the opposite of exploring out of a security which frees our curiosity.

For these same reasons a child, as long as he is not sure his immediate human environment will protect him, needs to believe that superior powers, such as a guardian angel, watch over him, and that the world and his place within it are of paramount importance. Here is one connection between a family's ability to provide basic security and the child's readiness to engage in rational investigations as he grows up.

As long as parents fully believed that Biblical stories solved the riddle of our existence and its purpose, it was easy to make a child feel secure. The Bible was felt to contain the answers to all pressing questions: the Bible told man all he needed to know to understand the world, how it came into being, and how to behave in it. In the Western world the Bible also provided prototypes for man's imagination. But rich as the Bible is in stories, not even during the most religious of times were these stories sufficient for meeting all the psychic needs of man.

Part of the reason for this is that while the Old and New Testaments and the histories of the saints provided answers to the crucial questions of how to live the good life, they did not offer solutions for the problems posed by the dark sides of our personalities. The Biblical stories suggest essentially only one solution for the asocial aspects of the unconscious: repression of these (unacceptable) strivings. But children, not having their ids in conscious control, need stories which permit at least fantasy satisfaction of these "bad" tendencies, and specific models for their sublimation.

Explicitly and implicitly, the Bible tells of God's demands on man. While we are told that there is greater rejoicing about a sinner who reformed than about the man who never erred, the message is still that we ought to live the good life, and not, for example, take cruel revenge on those whom we hate. As the story of Cain and Abel shows, there is no sympathy in the Bible for the agonies of sibling rivalry—only a warning that acting upon it has devastating consequences.

But what a child needs most, when beset by jealousy of his sibling, is the permission to feel that what he experiences is justified by the situation he is in. To bear up under the pangs of his envy, the child needs to be encouraged to engage in fantasies of getting even someday; then he will be able to manage at the moment, because of the conviction that the future will set things aright. Most of all, the child wants support for his still very tenuous belief that through growing up, working hard, and maturing he will one day be the victorious one. If his present sufferings will be rewarded in the future, he need not act on his jealousy of the moment, the way Cain did.

Like Biblical stories and myths, fairy tales were the literature which edified everybody—children and adults alike—for nearly all of man's existence. Except that God is central, many Bible stories can be recognized as very similar to fairy tales. In the story of Jonah and the whale, for example, Jonah is trying to run away from his superego's (conscience's) demand that he fight against the wickedness of the people of Nineveh. The ordeal which tests his moral fiber is, as in so many fairy tales, a perilous voyage in which he has to prove himself.

Jonah's trip across the sea lands him in the belly of a great fish. There, in great danger, Jonah discovers his higher morality, his higher self, and is wondrously reborn, now ready to meet the rigorous demands of his superego. But the rebirth alone does not achieve true humanity for him: to be a slave neither to the id and the pleasure principle (avoiding arduous tasks by trying to escape from them) nor to the superego (wishing destruction upon the wicked city) means true freedom and higher selfhood. Jonah attains his full humanity only when he is no longer subservient to either institution of his mind, but relinquishes blind obedience to both id and superego and is able to recognize God's wisdom in judging the people of Nineveh not according to the rigid structures of Jonah's superego, but in terms of their human frailty.

VICARIOUS SATISFACTION VERSUS CONSCIOUS RECOGNITION

Like all great art, fairy tales both delight and instruct; their special genius is that they do so in terms which speak directly to children. At the age when these stories are most meaningful to the child, his major problem is to bring some order into the inner chaos of his mind so that he can understand himself better—a necessary preliminary for achieving some congruence between his perceptions and the external world.

"True" stories about the "real" world may provide some interesting and often useful information. But the way these stories unfold is as alien to the way the prepubertal child's mind functions as the supernatural events of the fairy tale are to the way the mature intellect comprehends the world.

Strictly realistic stories run counter to the child's inner experiences;

he will listen to them and maybe get something out of them, but he cannot extract much personal meaning from them that transcends obvious content. These stories inform without enriching, as is unfortunately also true of much learning in school. Factual knowledge profits the total personality only when it is turned into "personal knowledge."* Outlawing realistic stories for children would be as foolish as banning fairy tales; there is an important place for each in the life of the child. But a fare of realistic stories only is barren. When realistic stories are combined with ample and psychologically correct exposure to fairy tales, then the child receives information which speaks to both parts of his budding personality—the rational and the emotional.

Fairy tales contain some dreamlike features, but these are akin to what happens in the dreams of adolescents or adults, not of children. Startling and incomprehensible as an adult's dreams may be, all their details make sense when analyzed and permit the dreamer to understand what preoccupies his unconscious mind. By analyzing his dreams, a person can gain a much better understanding of himself through comprehending aspects of his mental life which had escaped his notice, were distorted or denied—not recognized before. Considering the important role such unconscious desires, needs, pressures, and anxieties play in behavior, new insights into oneself from dreams permit a person to arrange his life much more successfully.

Children's dreams are very simple: wishes are fulfilled and anxieties are given tangible form. For example, in a child's dream an animal beats him up, or devours some person. A child's dreams contain unconscious content that remains practically unshaped by his ego; the higher mental functions hardly enter into his dream production. For this reason, children cannot and should not analyze their dreams. A child's ego is still weak and in the process of being built up. Particularly before school age, the child has to struggle continually to prevent the pressures of his desires from overpowering his total personality—a battle against the powers of the unconscious which he loses more often than not.

This struggle, which is never entirely absent from our lives, remains a dubious battle well into adolescence, although as we grow older we

*"The act of knowing includes an appraisal, a personal coefficient which shapes all factual knowledge," writes Michael Polanyi. If the greatest scientist has to rely to a considerable degree on "personal knowledge," it seems obvious that children cannot acquire knowledge truly meaningful to them unless they have first shaped it by introducing their personal coefficients.²⁰

also have to contend with the irrational tendencies of the superego. As we mature, all three institutions of the mind—id, ego, and superego—become ever more clearly articulated and separated from each other, each able to interact with the other two without the unconscious overpowering the conscious. The repertoire of the ego for dealing with id and superego becomes more varied, and the mentally healthy individual exercises, in the normal course of events, effective control over their interaction.

In a child, however, whenever his unconscious comes to the fore, it immediately overwhelms his total personality. Far from being strengthened by the experience of his ego recognizing the chaotic content of his unconscious, the child's ego is weakened by such direct contact, because it is overwhelmed. This is why a child has to externalize his inner processes if he is to gain any grasp—not to mention control—of them. The child must somehow distance himself from the content of his unconscious and see it as something external to him, to gain any sort of mastery over it.

In normal play, objects such as dolls and toy animals are used to embody various aspects of the child's personality which are too complex, unacceptable, and contradictory for him to handle. This permits the child's ego to gain some mastery over these elements, which he cannot do when asked or forced by circumstances to recognize these as projections of his own inner processes.

Some unconscious pressures in children can be worked out through play. But many do not lend themselves to it because they are too complex and contradictory, or too dangerous and socially disapproved. For example, the feelings of the Jinny while it was sealed into the jar, as discussed before, are so ambivalent, violent, and potentially destructive that a child could not act these out on his own in play because he could not comprehend these feelings sufficiently to externalize them through play, and also because the consequences might be too dangerous. Here, knowing fairy tales is a great help to the child, as illustrated by the fact that many fairy stories are acted out by children, but only after the children have become familiar with the story, which they never could have invented on their own.

For example, most children are delighted to act out "Cinderella" in dramatic form, but only after the fairy tale has become part of their imaginary world, including especially its happy ending to the situation of intense sibling rivalry. It is impossible for a child to fantasize on his own that he will be rescued, that those who he is convinced despise him and have power over him will come to recognize his

superiority. Many a girl is so convinced at moments that her bad (step)mother is the source of all her troubles that, on her own, she is not likely to imagine that it could all suddenly change. But when the idea is presented to her through "Cinderella," she can believe that at any moment a good (fairy) mother may come to the rescue, since the fairy tale tells her in a convincing fashion that this will be the case.

A child can give body to deep desires, such as the oedipal one of wanting to have a baby with mother or father, indirectly by taking care of a toy or real animal as if it were a baby. In doing so, the child is satisfying a deeply felt need by externalizing the wish. Helping the child to become aware of what the doll or animal represents to him, and what he is acting out in his play with it—as would happen in adult psychoanalysis of his dream material—throws the child into deep confusion beyond his years. The reason is that a child does not yet possess a secure sense of identity. Before a masculine or feminine identity is well established, it is easily shaken or destroyed by recognition of complicated, destructive, or oedipal wishes that are contrary to a firm identity.

Through play with a doll or animal, a child can vicariously satisfy a desire for giving birth to and caring for a baby, and a boy can do this as much as a girl. But, unlike a girl, a boy can derive psychological comfort from baby-doll playing only as long as he is not induced to recognize what unconscious desires he is satisfying.

It might be argued that it would be good for boys to recognize consciously this wish to bear children. I hold that a boy's being able to act on his unconscious desire by playing with dolls is good for him, and that it should be accepted positively. Such externalization of unconscious pressures can be valuable, but it becomes dangerous if recognition of the unconscious meaning of the behavior comes to consciousness before sufficient maturity has been achieved to sublimate desires which cannot be satisfied in reality.

Many girls of an older age group are deeply involved with horses; they play with toy horses and spin elaborate fantasies around them. When they get older and have the opportunity, their lives seem to rotate around real horses, which they take excellent care of and seem inseparable from. Psychoanalytic investigation has revealed that over-involvement in and with horses can stand for many different emotional needs which the girl is trying to satisfy. For example, by controlling this powerful animal she can come to feel that she is controlling the male, or the sexually animalistic, within herself. Imagine what it would do to a girl's enjoyment of riding, to her self-respect, if she were

made conscious of this desire which she is acting out in riding. She would be devastated—robbed of a harmless and enjoyable sublimation, and reduced in her own eyes to a bad person. At the same time, she would be hard-pressed to find an equally suitable outlet for such inner pressures, and therefore might not be able to master them.

As to fairy tales, one might say that the child who is not exposed to this literature is as badly off as the girl who is anxious to discharge her inner pressures through horseback riding or taking care of horses, but is deprived of her innocent enjoyment. A child who is made aware of what the figures in fairy tales stand for in his own psychology will be robbed of a much-needed outlet, and devastated by having to realize the desires, anxieties, and vengeful feelings that are ravaging him. Like the horse, fairy tales can and do serve children well, can even make an unbearable life seem worth living, as long as the child doesn't know what they mean to him psychologically.

While a fairy tale may contain many dreamlike features, its great advantage over a dream is that the fairy tale has a consistent structure with a definite beginning and a plot that moves toward a satisfying solution which is reached at the end. The fairy tale also has other important advantages when compared to private fantasies. For one, whatever the content of a fairy tale—which may run parallel to a child's private fantasies whether these are oedipal, vengefully sadistic, or belittling of a parent—it can be openly talked about, because the child does not need to keep secret his feelings about what goes on in the fairy tale, or feel guilty about enjoying such thoughts.

The fairy-tale hero has a body which can perform miraculous deeds. By identifying with him, any child can compensate in fantasy and through identification for all the inadequacies, real or imagined, of his own body. He can fantasize that he too, like the hero, can climb into the sky, defeat giants, change his appearance, become the most powerful or most beautiful person—in short, have his body be and do all the child could possibly wish for. After his most grandiose desires have thus been satisfied in fantasy, the child can be more at peace with his body as it is in reality. The fairy tale even projects this acceptance of reality for the child, because while extraordinary transfigurations in the hero's body occur as the story unfolds, he becomes a mere mortal again once the struggle is over. At the fairy story's end we hear no more about the hero's unearthly beauty or strength. This is quite unlike the mythical hero, who retains his superhuman characteristics forever. Once the fairy-tale hero has achieved his true identity at the story's ending (and with it inner security about himself, his body, his

life, his position in society), he is happy the way he is, and no longer unusual in any respect.

For the fairy tale to have beneficial externalization effects, the child must remain unaware of the unconscious pressures he is responding to by making fairy-story solutions his own.

The fairy story begins where the child is at this time in his life and where, without the help of the story, he would remain stuck: feeling neglected, rejected, degraded. Then, using thought processes which are his own—contrary to adult rationality as these may be—the story opens glorious vistas which permit the child to overcome momentary feelings of utter hopelessness. In order to believe the story, and to make its optimistic outlook part of his world experience, the child needs to hear it many times. If in addition he acts it out, this makes it that much more “true” and “real.”

The child *feels* which of the many fairy tales is true to his inner situation of the moment (which he is unable to deal with on his own), and he also feels where the story provides him with a handle for coming to grips with a difficult problem. But this is seldom an immediate recognition, achieved upon hearing a fairy tale for the first time. For that, some elements of the fairy story are too strange—as they must be in order to speak to deeply hidden emotions.

Only on repeated hearing of a fairy tale, and when given ample time and opportunity to linger over it, is a child able to profit fully from what the story has to offer him in regard to understanding himself and his experience of the world. Only then will the child's free associations to the story yield the tale's most personal meaning to him, and thus help him to cope with problems that oppress him. On the first hearing of a fairy tale, for example, a child cannot cast himself in the role of a figure of the other sex. It takes distance and personal elaboration over time before a girl can identify with Jack in “Jack and the Beanstalk” and a boy with Rapunzel.*

*Here once more fairy tales may be compared with dreams, though this can be done only with great caution and many qualifications, the dream being the most personal expression of the unconscious and the experiences of a particular person, while the fairy tale is the imaginary form that more or less universal human problems have attained as a story has been passed on over generations.

Hardly ever does a dream that goes beyond the most direct wish-fulfilling fantasies permit understanding of its meaning on first recall. Dreams which are the result of complex inner processes need repeated mulling over before comprehension of the dream's latent meaning is arrived at. Frequent and leisurely contemplation of all of the dream's features, rearranging these in a different order from that first recalled; changes in emphasis; and much else is required to find deep meaning in what at first

I have known parents whose child reacted to a fairy story by saying “I like it,” and so they moved on to telling another one, thinking that an additional tale would increase the child's enjoyment. But the child's remark, as likely as not, expresses an as yet vague feeling that this story has something important to tell him—something that will get lost if the child is not given repetition of the story and time to grasp it. Redirecting the child's thoughts prematurely to a second story may kill the impact of the first, while doing so at a later time may increase it.

When fairy tales are being read to children in classes, or in libraries during story hour, the children seem fascinated. But often they are given no chance to contemplate the tales or otherwise react; either they are herded immediately to some other activity, or another story of a different kind is told to them, which dilutes or destroys the impression the fairy story had created. Talking with children after such an experience, it appears that the story might as well not have been told, for all the good it has done them. But when the storyteller gives the children ample time to reflect on the story, to immerse themselves in the atmosphere that hearing it creates in them, and when they are encouraged to talk about it, then later conversation reveals that the story offers a great deal emotionally and intellectually, at least to some of the children.

Like the patients of Hindu medicine men who were asked to contemplate a fairy tale to find a way out of the inner darkness which beclouded their minds, the child, too, should be given the opportunity to slowly make a fairy tale his own by bringing his own associations to and into it.

This, incidentally, is the reason why illustrated storybooks, so much preferred by both modern adults and children, do not serve the child's best needs. The illustrations are distracting rather than helpful. Stud-

appeared senseless, or quite simple. Only as one goes over the same material repeatedly do features which for some time seemed merely distracting, pointless, impossible, or otherwise nonsensical begin to offer up important clues for grasping what the dream was all about. More often than not, for a dream to yield its deeper meaning, other imaginative material has to be called on to enrich the understanding. Such was the recourse taken by Freud to fairy tales, to elucidate the dreams of the Wolf Man.²¹

In psychoanalysis, free associations are one method to provide additional clues for what one or another detail may signify. In fairy tales, too, the child's associations are needed to have the story gain its full personal importance. Here other fairy tales the child has heard provide additional fantasy material, and can become more meaningful.

ies of illustrated primers demonstrate that the pictures divert from the learning process rather than foster it, because the illustrations direct the child's imagination away from how he, on his own, would experience the story. The illustrated story is robbed of much content of personal meaning which it could bring to the child who applied only his own visual associations to the story, instead of those of the illustrator.²²

Tolkien, too, thought that "However good in themselves, illustrations do little good to fairy stories. . . . If a story says, 'He climbed a hill and saw a river in the valley below,' the illustrator may catch, or nearly catch, his own vision of such a scene, but every hearer of the words will have his own picture, and it will be made out of all the hills and rivers and dales he has ever seen, but especially out of The Hill, The River, The Valley which were for him the first embodiment of the word."²³ This is why a fairy tale loses much of its personal meaning when its figures and events are given substance not by the child's imagination, but by that of an illustrator. The unique details derived from his own particular life, with which a hearer's mind depicts a story he is told or read, make the story much more of a personal experience. Adults and children alike often prefer the easy way of having somebody else do the hard task of imagining the scene of the story. But if we let an illustrator determine our imagination, it becomes less our own, and the story loses much of its personal significance.

Asking children, for example, what a monster they have heard about in a story looks like, elicits the widest variations of embodiment: huge human-like figures, animal-like ones, others which combine certain human with some animal-like features, etc.—and each of these details has great meaning to the person who in his mind's eye created this particular pictorial realization. On the other hand, seeing the monster as painted by the artist in a particular way, conforming to *his* imagination, which is so much more complete as compared to our own vague and shifting image, robs us of this meaning. The idea of the monster may then leave us entirely cold, having nothing of importance to tell us, or may scare us without evoking any deeper meaning beyond anxiety.

THE IMPORTANCE OF EXTERNALIZATION

FANTASY FIGURES AND EVENTS

A young child's mind contains a rapidly expanding collection of often ill-assorted and only partially integrated impressions: some correctly seen aspects of reality, but many more elements completely dominated by fantasy. Fantasy fills the huge gaps in a child's understanding which are due to the immaturity of his thinking and his lack of pertinent information. Other distortions are the consequence of inner pressures which lead to misinterpretations of the child's perceptions.

The normal child begins his fantasizing with some more or less correctly observed segment of reality, which may evoke such strong needs or anxieties in him that he gets carried away by them. Things often become so muddled in his mind that he is not able to sort them out at all. But some orderliness is necessary for the child to return to reality not weakened or defeated, but strengthened by this excursion into his fantasies.

Fairy tales, proceeding as the child's mind does, help the child by showing how a higher clarity can and does emerge from all this fantasy. These tales, like the child in his own imagining, usually start out in a quite realistic way: a mother telling her daughter to go all by herself to visit grandmother ("Little Red Riding Hood"); the troubles a poor couple are having feeding their children ("Hansel and Gretel"); a fisherman not catching any fish in his net ("The Fisherman and the Jinny"). That is, the story begins with a real but somewhat problematic situation.

A child presented with perplexing everyday problems and events is stimulated by his schooling to understand the how and why of such situations, and to seek solutions. But since his rationality has as yet poor control over his unconscious, the child's imagination runs away with him under the pressure of his emotions and unsolved conflicts. A child's barely emerging ability to reason is soon overwhelmed by anxieties, hopes, fears, desires, loves, and hates—which become woven into whatever the child began thinking about.