INTRODUCTION:
THE STRUGGLE FOR MEANING

If we hope to live not just from moment to moment, but in true consciousness of our existence, then our greatest need and most difficult achievement is to find meaning in our lives. It is well known how many have lost the will to live, and have stopped trying, because such meaning has eluded them. An understanding of the meaning of one’s life is not suddenly acquired at a particular age, not even when one has reached chronological maturity. On the contrary, gaining a secure understanding of what the meaning of one’s life may or ought to be—this is what constitutes having attained psychological maturity. And this achievement is the end result of a long development: at each age we seek, and must be able to find, some modicum of meaning congruent with how our minds and understanding have already developed.

Contrary to the ancient myth, wisdom does not burst forth fully developed like Athena out of Zeus’s head; it is built up, small step by small step, from most irrational beginnings. Only in adulthood can an intelligent understanding of the meaning of one’s existence in this world be gained from one’s experiences in it. Unfortunately, too many parents want their children’s minds to function as their own do—as if mature understanding of ourselves and the world, and our ideas about the meaning of life, did not have to develop as slowly as our bodies and minds.

Today, as in times past, the most important and also the most difficult task in raising a child is helping him to find meaning in life. Many growth experiences are needed to achieve this. The child, as he develops, must learn step by step to understand himself better; with this he becomes more able to understand others, and eventually can relate to them in ways which are mutually satisfying and meaningful.

To find deeper meaning, one must become able to transcend the
narrow confines of a self-centered existence and believe that one will make a significant contribution to life—if not right now, then at some future time. This feeling is necessary if a person is to be satisfied with himself and with what he is doing. In order not to be at the mercy of the vagaries of life, one must develop one's inner resources, so that one's emotions, imagination, and intellect mutually support and enrich one another. Our positive feelings give us the strength to develop our rationality; only hope for the future can sustain us in the adversities we unavoidably encounter.

As an educator and therapist of severely disturbed children, my main task was to restore meaning to their lives. This work made it obvious to me that if children were reared so that life was meaningful to them, they would not need special help. I was confronted with the problem of deducing what experiences in a child's life are most suited to promote his ability to find meaning in his life, to endow life in general with more meaning. Regarding this task, nothing is more important than the impact of parents and others who take care of the child; second in importance is our cultural heritage, when transmitted to the child in the right manner. When children are young, it is literature that carries such information best.

Given this fact, I became deeply dissatisfied with much of the literature intended to develop the child's mind and personality, because it fails to stimulate and nurture those resources he needs most in order to cope with his difficult inner problems. The preprimers and primers from which he is taught to read in school are designed to teach the necessary skills, irrespective of meaning. The overwhelming bulk of the rest of so-called "children's literature" attempts to entertain or to inform, or both. But most of these books are so shallow in substance that little of significance can be gained from them. The acquisition of skills, including the ability to read, becomes devalued when what one has learned to read adds nothing of importance to one's life.

We all tend to assess the future merits of an activity on the basis of what it offers now. But this is especially true for the child, who, much more than the adult, lives in the present and, although he has anxieties about his future, has only the vaguest notions of what it may require or be like. The idea that learning to read may enable one later to enrich one's life is experienced as an empty promise when the stories the child listens to, or is reading at the moment, are vacuous. The worst feature of these children's books is that they cheat the child of what he ought to gain from the experience of literature: access to deeper meaning, and that which is meaningful to him at his stage of development.

For a story truly to hold the child's attention, it must entertain him and arouse his curiosity. But to enrich his life, it must stimulate his imagination; help him to develop his intellect and to clarify his emotions; be attuned to his anxieties and aspirations; give full recognition to his difficulties, while at the same time suggesting solutions to the problems which perturb him. In short, it must at one and the same time relate to all aspects of his personality—and this without ever belittling but, on the contrary, giving full credence to the seriousness of the child's predicaments, while simultaneously promoting confidence in himself and in his future.

In all these and many other respects, of the entire "children's literature"—with rare exceptions—nothing can be as enriching and satisfying to child and adult alike as the folk fairy tale. True, on an overt level fairy tales teach little about the specific conditions of life in modern mass society; these tales were created long before it came into being. But more can be learned from them about the inner problems of human beings, and of the right solutions to their predicaments in any society, than from any other type of story within a child's comprehension. Since the child at every moment of his life is exposed to the society in which he lives, he will certainly learn to cope with its conditions, provided his inner resources permit him to do so.

Just because his life is often bewildering to him, the child needs even more to be given the chance to understand himself in this complex world with which he must learn to cope. To be able to do so, the child must be helped to make some coherent sense out of the turmoil of his feelings. He needs ideas on how to bring his inner house into order, and on that basis able to create order in his life. He needs—and this hardly requires emphasis at this moment in our history—a moral education which subtly, and by implication only, conveys to him the advantages of moral behavior, not through abstract ethical concepts but through that which seems tangibly right and therefore meaningful to him.

The child finds this kind of meaning through fairy tales. Like many other modern psychological insights, this was anticipated long ago by poets. The German poet Schiller wrote: "Deeper meaning resides in the fairy tales told to me in my childhood than in the truth that is taught by life." (The Piccolomini, III, 4.)

Through the centuries (if not millennia) during which, in their retelling, fairy tales became ever more refined, they came to convey at the same time overt and covert meanings—came to speak simultaneously to all levels of the human personality, communicating in a manner which reaches the uneducated mind of the child as well as that
of the sophisticated adult. Applying the psychoanalytic model of the human personality, fairy tales carry important messages to the conscious, the preconscious, and the unconscious mind, on whatever level each is functioning at the time. By dealing with universal human problems, particularly those which preoccupy the child’s mind, these stories speak to his budding ego and encourage its development, while at the same time releasing preconscious and unconscious pressures. As the stories unfold, they give conscious credence and body to id pressures and show ways to satisfy those that are in line with ego and superego requirements.

But my interest in fairy tales is not the result of such a technical analysis of their merits. It is, on the contrary, the consequence of asking myself why, in my experience, children—normal and abnormal alike, and at all levels of intelligence—find folk fairy tales more satisfying than all other children’s stories.

The more I tried to understand why these stories are so successful at enriching the inner life of the child, the more I realized that these tales, in a much deeper sense than any other reading material, start where the child really is in his psychological and emotional being. They speak about his severe inner pressures in a way that the child unconsciously understands, and—without belittling the most serious inner struggles which growing up entails—offer examples of both temporary and permanent solutions to pressing difficulties.

When a grant from the Spencer Foundation provided the leisure to study what contributions psychoanalysis can make to the education of children—and since reading and being read to are essential means of education—it seemed appropriate to use this opportunity to explore in greater detail and depth why folk fairy tales are so valuable in the upbringing of children. My hope is that a proper understanding of the unique merits of fairy tales will induce parents and teachers to assign them once again to that central role in the life of the child they held for centuries.

Fairy Tales and the Existential Predicament

In order to master the psychological problems of growing up—overcoming narcissistic disappointments, oedipal dilemmas, sibling rivalries; becoming able to relinquish childhood dependencies; gaining a feeling of selfhood and of self-worth, and a sense of moral obligation
INTRODUCTION

professes a belief in an optimistic melliorism. Psychoanalysis itself is viewed as having the purpose of making life easy—but this is not what its founder intended. Psychoanalysis was created to enable man to accept the problematic nature of life without being defeated by it, or giving in to escapism. Freud's prescription is that only by struggling courageously against what seem like overwhelming odds can man succeed in wringing meaning out of his existence.

This is exactly the message that fairy tales get across to the child in manifold form: that a struggle against severe difficulties in life is unavoidable, is an intrinsic part of human existence—but that if one does not shy away, but steadfastly meets unexpected and often unjust hardships, one masters all obstacles and at the end emerges victorious.

Modern stories written for young children mainly avoid these existential problems, although they are crucial issues for all of us. The child needs most particularly to be given suggestions in symbolic form about how he may deal with these issues and grow safely into maturity. "Safe" stories mention neither death nor aging, the limits to our existence, nor the wish for eternal life. The fairy tale, by contrast, confronts the child squarely with the basic human predicaments.

For example, many fairy stories begin with the death of a mother or father; in these tales the death of the parent creates the most agonizing problems, as it (or the fear of it) does in real life. Other stories tell about an aging parent who decides that the time has come to let the new generation take over. But before this can happen, the successor has to prove himself capable and worthy. The Brothers Grimm's story "The Three Feathers" begins: "There was once upon a time a king who had three sons... When the king had become old and weak, and was thinking of his end, he did not know which of his sons should inherit the kingdom after him." In order to decide, the king sets all his sons a difficult task; the son who meets it best shall be king after my death.

It is characteristic of fairy tales to state an existential dilemma briefly and pointedly. This permits the child to come to grips with the problem in its most essential form, where a more complex plot would confuse matters for him. The fairy tale simplifies all situations. Its figures are clearly drawn; and details, unless very important, are eliminated. All characters are typical rather than unique.

Contrary to what takes place in many modern children's stories, in fairy tales evil is as omnipresent as virtue. In practically every fairy tale good and evil are given body in the form of some figures and their actions, as good and evil are omnipresent in life and the propensities for both are present in every man. It is this duality which poses the moral problem, and requires the struggle to solve it.

Evil is not without its attractions—symbolized by the mighty giant or dragon, the power of the witch, the cunning queen in "Snow White"—and often it is temporarily in the ascendancy. In many fairy tales a usurper succeeds for a time in seizing the place which rightfully belongs to the hero—as the wicked sisters do in "Cinderella." It is not that the evildoer is punished at the story's end which makes immersing oneself in fairy stories an experience in moral education, although this is part of it. In fairy tales, as in life, punishment or fear of it is only a limited deterrent to crime. The conviction that crime does not pay is a much more effective deterrent, and that is why in fairy tales the bad person always loses out. It is not the fact that virtue wins out at the end which promotes morality, but that the hero is most attractive to the child, who identifies with the hero in all his struggles. Because of this identification the child imagines that he suffers with the hero his trials and tribulations, and triumphs with him as virtue is victorious. The child makes such identifications all on his own, and the inner and outer struggles of the hero impinge morality on him.

The figures in fairy tales are not ambivalent—not good and bad at the same time, as we all are in reality. But since polarization dominates the child's mind, it also dominates fairy tales. A person is either good or bad, nothing in between. One brother is stupid, the other is clever. One sister is virtuous and industrious, the others are vile and lazy. One is beautiful, the others are ugly. One parent is all good, the other evil. The juxtaposition of opposite characters is not for the purpose of stressing right behavior, as would be true for cautionary tales. (There are some amoral fairy tales where goodness or badness, beauty or ugliness play no role at all.) Presenting the polarities of character permits the child to comprehend easily the difference between the two, which he could not do as readily were the figures drawn more true to life, with all the complexities that characterize real people. Ambiguities must wait until a relatively firm personality has been established on the basis of positive identifications. Then the child has a basis for understanding that there are great differences between people, and that therefore one has to make choices about who one wants to be. This basic decision, on which all later personality development will build, is facilitated by the polarizations of the fairy tale.

Furthermore, a child's choices are based, not so much on right versus wrong, as on who arouses his sympathy and who his antipathy.
The more simple and straightforward a good character, the easier it is for a child to identify with it and to reject the bad other. The child identifies with the good hero not because of his goodness, but because the hero’s condition makes a deep positive appeal to him. The question for the child is not “Do I want to be good?” but “Who do I want to be like?” The child decides this on the basis of projecting himself wholeheartedly into one character. If this fairy-tale figure is a very good person, then the child decides that he wants to be good, too.

Amoral fairy tales show no polarization or juxtaposition of good and bad persons; that is because these amoral stories serve an entirely different purpose. Such tales or type figures as “Puss in Boots,” who arranges for the hero’s success through trickery, and Jack, who steals the giant’s treasure, build character not by promoting choices between good and bad, but by giving the child the hope that even the meekest can succeed in life. After all, what’s the use of choosing to become a good person when one feels so insignificant that he fears he will never amount to anything? Morality is not the issue in these tales, but rather, assurance that one can succeed. Whether one meets life with a belief in the possibility of mastering its difficulties or with the expectation of defeat is also a very important existential problem.

The deep inner conflicts originating in our primitive drives and our violent emotions are all denied in much of modern children’s literature, and so the child is not helped in coping with them. But the child is subject to desperate feelings of loneliness and isolation, and he often experiences mortal anxiety. More often than not, he is unable to express these feelings in words, or he can do so only by indirect expression: fear of the dark, of some animal, anxiety about his body. Since it creates discomfort in a parent to recognize these emotions in his child, the parent tends to overlook them, or he belittles these spoken fears out of his own anxiety, believing this will cover over the child’s fears.

The fairy tale, by contrast, takes these existential anxieties and dilemmas very seriously and addresses itself directly to them: the need to be loved and the fear that one is thought worthless; the love of life, and the fear of death. Further, the fairy tale offers solutions in ways that the child can grasp on his level of understanding. For example, fairy tales pose the dilemma of wishing to live eternally by occasionally concluding: “If they have not died, they are still alive.” The other ending—“And they lived happily ever after”—does not for a moment fool the child that eternal life is possible. But it does indicate that which alone can take the sting out of the narrow limits of our time on this earth: forming a truly satisfying bond to another. The tales teach that when one has done this, one has reached the ultimate in emotional security of existence and permanence of relation available to man; and this alone can dissipate the fear of death. If one has found true adult love, the fairy story also tells, one doesn’t need to wish for eternal life. This is suggested by another ending found in fairy tales: “They lived for a long time afterward, happy and in pleasure.”

An uninformed view of the fairy tale sees in this type of ending an unrealistic wish-fulfillment, missing completely the important message it conveys to the child. These tales tell him that by forming a true interpersonal relation, one escapes the separation anxiety which haunts him (and which sets the stage for many fairy tales, but is always resolved at the story’s ending). Furthermore, the story tells, this ending is not made possible, as the child wishes and believes, by holding on to his mother eternally. If we try to escape separation anxiety and death anxiety by desperately keeping our grasp on our parents, we will only be cruelly forced out, like Hansel and Gretel.

Only by going out into the world can the fairy-tale hero (child) find himself there; and as he does, he will also find the other with whom he will be able to live happily ever after; that is, without ever again having to experience separation anxiety. The fairy tale is future-oriented and guides the child—in terms he can understand in both his conscious and his unconscious mind—to relinquish his infantile dependency wishes and achieve a more satisfying independent existence.

Today children no longer grow up within the security of an extended family, or of a well-integrated community. Therefore, even more than at the times fairy tales were invented, it is important to provide the modern child with images of heroes who have to go out into the world all by themselves and who, although originally ignorant of the ultimate things, find secure places in the world by following their right way with deep inner confidence.

The fairy-tale hero proceeds for a time in isolation, as the modern child often feels isolated. The hero is helped by being in touch with primitive things—a tree, an animal, nature—as the child feels more in touch with those things than most adults do. The fate of these heroes convinces the child that, like them, he may feel outcast and abandoned in the world, groping in the dark, but, like them, in the course of his life he will be guided step by step, and given help when it is needed. Today, even more than in past times, the child needs the reassurance offered by the image of the isolated man who nevertheless is capable of achieving meaningful and rewarding relations with the world around him.
The Fairy Tale: A Unique Art Form

While it entertains the child, the fairy tale enlightens him about himself, and fosters his personality development. It offers meaning on so many different levels, and enriches the child’s existence in so many ways, that no one book can do justice to the multitude and diversity of the contributions such tales make to the child’s life.

This book attempts to show how fairy stories represent in imaginative form what the process of healthy human development consists of, and how the tales make such development attractive for the child to engage in. This growth process begins with the resistance against the parents and fear of growing up, and ends when youth has truly found itself, achieved psychological independence and moral maturity, and no longer views the other sex as threatening or demonic, but is able to relate positively to it. In short, this book explicates why fairy tales make such great and positive psychological contributions to the child’s inner growth.

The delight we experience when we allow ourselves to respond to a fairy tale, the enchantment we feel, comes not from the psychological meaning of a tale (although this contributes to it) but from its literary qualities—the tale itself as a work of art. The fairy tale could not have its psychological impact on the child were it not first and foremost a work of art.

Fairy tales are unique, not only as a form of literature, but as works of art which are fully comprehensible to the child, as no other form of art is. As with all great art, the fairy tale’s deepest meaning will be different for each person, and different for the same person at various moments in his life. The child will extract different meaning from the same fairy tale, depending on his interests and needs of the moment. When given the chance, he will return to the same tale when he is ready to enlarge on old meanings, or replace them with new ones.

As works of art, fairy tales have many aspects worth exploring in addition to the psychological meaning and impact to which this book is devoted. For example, our cultural heritage finds expression in fairy tales, and through them is communicated to the child’s mind.1

1 One example may illustrate: In the Brothers Grimm’s story “The Seven Ravens,” seven brothers disappear and become ravens as their sister enters life. Water has to be fetched from the well in a jug for the girl’s baptism, and the loss of the jug is the fateful event which sets the stage for the story. The ceremony of baptism also heralds other volume could detail the unique contribution fairy tales can and do make to the child’s moral education, a topic which is only touched on in the pages which follow.

Folklorists approach fairy tales in ways germane to their discipline; linguists and literary critics examine their meaning for other reasons. It is interesting to observe that, for example, some see in the motif of Little Red Riding Hood’s being swallowed by the wolf the theme of night devouring the day, of the moon eclipsing the sun, of winter replacing the warm seasons, of the god swallowing the sacrificial victim, and so on. Interesting as such interpretations are, they seem to offer little to the parent or educator who wants to know what meaning a fairy story may have to the child, whose experience is, after all, quite far removed from interpretations of the world on the basis of concerns with nature or celestial deities.

Fairy tales also abound in religious motifs; many Biblical stories are of the same nature as fairy tales. The conscious and unconscious associations which fairy tales evoke in the mind of the listener depend on his general frame of reference and his personal preoccupations. Hence, religious persons will find in them much of importance that is not mentioned here.

Most fairy tales originated in periods when religion was a most important part of life; thus, they deal, directly or by inference, with religious themes. The stories of The Thousand and One Nights are full of references to Islamic religion. A great many Western fairy tales have religious content; but most of these stories are neglected today and unknown to the larger public just because, for many, these religious themes no longer arouse universally and personally meaningful associations. The neglect of “Our Lady’s Child,” one of the most beautiful stories of the Brothers Grimm, illustrates this. It begins ex-
Introduction

may relate to the child's growing-up problems, to our understanding of ourselves and of the world. And the second part of the book, rather than striving for an exhaustive completeness that is beyond reach, examines some well-known favorites in some detail, for the meaning and pleasure that may be gained from them.

If this book had been devoted to only one or two tales, it would have been possible to show many more of their facets, although even then complete probing of their depths would not have been achieved; for this, each story has meanings on too many levels. Which story is most important to a particular child at a particular age depends entirely on his psychological stage of development, and the problems which are most pressing to him at the moment. While in writing the book it seemed reasonable to concentrate on a fairy tale's central meanings, this has the shortcoming of neglecting other aspects which might be much more significant to some individual child because of problems he is struggling with at the time. This, then, is another necessary limitation of this presentation.

For example, in discussing "Hansel and Gretel," the child's striving to hold on to his parents even though the time has come for meeting the world on his own is stressed, as well as the need to transcend a primitive orality, symbolized by the children's infatuation with the gingerbread house. Thus, it would seem that this fairy tale has most to offer to the young child ready to make his first steps out into the world. It gives body to his anxieties, and offers reassurance about these fears because even in their most exaggerated form—anxieties about being devoured—they prove unwarranted: the children are victorious in the end, and a most threatening enemy—the witch—is utterly defeated. Thus, a good case could be made that this story has its greatest appeal and value for the child at the age when fairy tales begin to exercise their beneficial impact, that is, around the age of four or five.

But separation anxiety—the fear of being deserted—and starvation fear, including oral greediness, are not restricted to a particular period of development. Such fears occur at all ages in the unconscious, and thus this tale also has meaning for, and provides encouragement to, much older children. As a matter of fact, the older person might find it considerably more difficult to admit consciously his fear of being deserted by his parents, or to face his oral greed; and this is even more reason to let the fairy tale speak to his unconscious, give body to his unconscious anxieties, and relieve them, without this ever coming to conscious awareness.

Other features of the same story may offer much-needed reassur-
ance and guidance to an older child. In early adolescence a girl had been fascinated by "Hansel and Gretel," and had derived great comfort from reading and rereading it, fantasizing about it. As a child, she had been dominated by a slightly older brother. He had, in a way, shown her the path, as Hansel did when he put down the pebbles which guided his sister and himself back home. As an adolescent, this girl continued to rely on her brother; and this feature of the story felt reassuring. But at the same time she also resented the brother's dominance. Without her being conscious of it at the time, her struggle for independence rotated around the figure of Hansel. The story told her unconscious that to follow Hansel's lead led her back, not forward, and it was also meaningful that although Hansel was the leader at the story's beginning, it was Gretel who in the end achieved freedom and independence for both, because it was she who defeated the witch. As an adult, this woman came to understand that the fairy tale had helped her greatly in throwing off her dependence on her brother, as it had convinced her that an early dependence on him need not interfere with her later ascendency. Thus, a story which for one reason had been meaningful to her as a young child provided guidance for her at adolescence for a quite different reason.

The central motif of "Snow White" is the pubertal girl's surpassing in every way the evil stepmother who, out of jealousy, denies her an independent existence—symbolically represented by the stepmother's trying to see Snow White destroyed. The story's deepest meaning for one particular five-year-old, however, was far removed from these pubertal problems. Her mother was cold and distant, so much so that she felt lost. The story assured her that she need not despair: Snow White, betrayed by her stepmother, was saved by males—first the dwarfs and later the prince. This child, too, did not despair because of the mother's desertion, but trusted that rescue would come from males. Confident that "Snow White" showed her the way, she turned to her father, who responded favorably; the fairy tale's happy ending made it possible for this girl to find a happy solution to the impasse in living into which her mother's lack of interest had projected her. Thus, a fairy tale can have as important a meaning to a five-year-old as to a thirteen-year-old, although the personal meanings they derive from it may be quite different.

In "Rapunzel" we learn that the enchantress locked Rapunzel into the tower when she reached the age of twelve. Thus, hers is likewise the story of a pubertal girl, and of a jealous mother who tries to prevent her from gaining independence—a typical adolescent prob-

lem, which finds a happy solution when Rapunzel becomes united with her prince. But one five-year-old boy gained quite a different reassurance from this story. When he learned that his grandmother, who took care of him most of the day, would have to go to the hospital because of serious illness—his mother was working all day, and there was no father in the home—he asked to be read the story of Rapunzel. At this critical time in his life, two elements of the tale were important to him. First, there was the security from all dangers in which the substitute mother kept the child, an idea which greatly appealed to him at that moment. So what normally could be viewed as a representation of negative, selfish behavior was capable of having a most reassuring meaning under specific circumstances. And even more important to the boy was another central motif of the story: that Rapunzel found the means of escaping her predicament in her own body—the tresses on which the prince climbed up to her room in the tower. That one's body can provide a lifeline reassured him that, if necessary, he would similarly find in his own body the source of his security. This shows that a fairy tale—because it addresses itself in the most imaginative form to essential human problems, and does so in an indirect way—can have much to offer to a little boy even if the story's heroine is an adolescent girl.

These examples may help to counteract any impression made by my concentration here on a story's main motifs, and demonstrate that fairy tales have great psychological meaning for children of all ages, both girls and boys, irrespective of the age and sex of the story's hero. Rich personal meaning is gained from fairy stories because they facilitate changes in identification as the child deals with different problems, one at a time. In the light of her earlier identification with a Gretel who was glad to be led by Hansel, the adolescent girl's later identification with a Gretel who overcame the witch made her growth toward independence more rewarding and secure. The little boy's first finding security in the idea of being kept within the safety of the tower permitted him later on to glory in the realization that a much more dependable security could be found in what his body had to offer him, by way of providing him with a lifetime.

As we cannot know at what age a particular fairy tale will be most important to a particular child, we cannot ourselves decide which of the many tales he should be told at any given time or why. This only the child can determine and reveal by the strength of feeling with which he reacts to what a tale evokes in his conscious and unconscious mind. Naturally a parent will begin by telling or reading to his child
a tale the parent himself or herself cared for as a child, or cares for now. If the child does not take to the story, this means that its motifs or themes have failed to evoke a meaningful response at this moment in his life. Then it is best to tell him another fairy tale the next evening. Soon he will indicate that certain stories have become important to him by his immediate response to it, or by his asking to be told this story over and over again. If all goes well, the child’s enthusiasm for this story will be contagious, and the story will become important to the parent too, if for no other reason than that it means so much to the child. Finally there will come the time when the child has gained all he can from the preferred story, or the problems which made him respond to it have been replaced by others which find better expression in some other tale. He may then temporarily lose interest in this story and enjoy some other one much more. In the telling of fairy stories it is always best to follow the child’s lead.

Even if a parent should guess correctly why his child has become involved emotionally with a given tale, this is knowledge best kept to oneself. The young child’s most important experiences and reactions are largely subconscious, and should remain so until he reaches a much more mature age and understanding. It is always intrusive to interpret a person’s unconscious thoughts, to make conscious what he wishes to keep preconscious, and this is especially true in the case of a child. Just as important for the child’s well-being as feeling that his parent shares his emotions, through enjoying the same fairy tale, is the child’s feeling that his inner thoughts are not known to his parent until he decides to reveal them. If the parent indicates that he knows them already, the child is prevented from making the most precious gift to his parent, sharing with him what until then was secret and private to the child. And since, in addition, a parent is so much more powerful than a child, his domination may appear limitless—and hence destructively overwhelming—if he seems able to read the child’s secret thoughts, know his most hidden feelings, even before the child himself has begun to become aware of them.

Explaining to a child why a fairy tale is so captivating to him destroys, moreover, the story’s enchantment, which depends on a considerable degree on the child’s not quite knowing why he is delighted by it. And with the forfeiture of this power to enchant goes also a loss of the story’s potential for helping the child struggle on his own, and master all by himself the problem which has made the story meaningful to him in the first place. Adult interpretations, as correct as they may be, rob the child of the opportunity to feel that he, on his own,

through repeated hearing and ruminating about the story, has coped successfully with a difficult situation. We grow, we find meaning in life, and security in ourselves by having understood and solved personal problems on our own, not by having them explained to us by others.

Fairy-tale motifs are not neurotic symptoms, something one is better off understanding rationally so that one can rid oneself of them. Such motifs are experienced as wondrous because the child feels understood and appreciated deep down in his feelings, hopes, and anxieties, without these all having to be dragged up and investigated in the harsh light of a rationality that is still beyond him. Fairy tales enrich the child’s life and give it an enchanted quality just because he does not quite know how the stories have worked their wonder on him.

This book has been written to help adults, and most especially those with children in their care, to become more fully aware of the importance of such tales. As has already been pointed out, innumerable interpretations besides those suggested in the text that follows may be pertinent; fairy tales, like all true works of art, possess a multifarious richness and depth that far transcend what even the most thorough discursive examination can extract from them. What is said in this book should be viewed as illustrative and suggestive merely. If the reader is stimulated to go beyond the surface in his own way, he will extract ever more varied personal meaning from these stories, which will then also become more meaningful to the children he may tell them to.

Here, however, one especially crucial limitation must be noted: The true meaning and impact of a fairy tale can be appreciated, its enchantment can be experienced, only from the story in its original form. Describing the significant features of a fairy tale gives as little feeling for what it is all about as the listing of the events of a poem does for its appreciation. Such a description of main features, however, is all that a book like this one can provide, short of actually reprinting the stories. Since most of these fairy tales are readily available elsewhere, the hope is that this book will be read in conjunction with a re-reading of the tales discussed.* Whether it is “Little Red Riding Hood,” “Cinderella,” or any other fairy tale, only the story itself permits an appreciation of its poetic qualities, and with it an understanding of how it enriches a responsive mind.

*The versions of the fairy tales discussed in this book are referred to in the Notes at the end of the book.
LIFE DIVINED
FROM THE INSIDE

"Little Red Riding Hood was my first love. I felt that if I could have married Little Red Riding Hood, I should have known perfect bliss." This statement by Charles Dickens indicates that he, like untold millions of children all over the world throughout the ages, was enchanted by fairy tales. Even when world-famous, Dickens acknowledged the deep formative impact that the wondrous figures and events of fairy tales had had on him and his creative genius. He repeatedly expressed scorn for those who, motivated by an uninformed and petty rationality, insisted on rationalizing, bowdlerizing, or outlawing these stories, and thus robbed children of the important contributions fairy tales could make to their lives. Dickens understood that the imagery of fairy tales helps children better than anything else in their most difficult and yet most important and satisfying task: achieving a more mature consciousness to civilize the chaotic pressures of their unconscious.

Today, as in the past, the minds of both creative and average children can be opened to an appreciation of all the higher things in life by fairy tales, from which they can move easily to enjoying the greatest works of literature and art. The poet Louis MacNeice, for example, tells that "Real fairy stories always meant much to me as a person, even when I was at a public school where to admit this meant losing face. Contrary to what many people say even now, a fairy story, at least of the classical folk variety, is a much more solid affair than the average naturalistic novel, whose hooks go little deeper than a gossip column. From folk tales and sophisticated fairy tales such as Hans Anderson's or Norse mythology and stories like the Alice books and Water Babies I graduated, at about the age of twelve, to the Faerie..."
Queene. **4 Literary critics such as G. K. Chesterton and C. S. Lewis felt that fairy stories are "spiritual explorations" and hence "the most life-like" since they reveal "human life as seen, or felt, or divined from the inside."**

Fairy tales, unlike any other form of literature, direct the child to discover his identity and calling, and they also suggest what experiences are needed to develop his character further. Fairy tales intimate that a rewarding, good life is within one’s reach despite adversity—but only if one does not shy away from the hazardous struggles without which one can never achieve true identity. These stories promise that if a child dares to engage in this fearsome and taxing search, benevolent powers will come to his aid, and he will succeed. The stories also warn that those who are too timorous and narrow-minded to risk themselves in finding themselves must settle down to a humdrum existence—if an even worse fate does not befall them.

Past generations of children who loved and felt the importance of fairy tales were subjected to the scorn only of pedants, as happened to MacNeice. Today many of our children are far more grievously bereaved—because they are deprived of the chance to know fairy stories at all. Most children now meet fairy tales only in prittified and simplified versions which subordinate their meaning and rob them of all deeper significance—versions such as those on films and TV shows, where fairy tales are turned into empty-minded entertainment.

Through most of man’s history, a child’s intellectual life, apart from immediate experiences within the family, depended on mythical and religious stories and on fairy tales. This traditional literature fed the child’s imagination and stimulated his fantasizing. Simultaneously, since these stories answered the child’s most important questions, they were a major agent of his socialization. Myths and closely related religious legends offered material from which children formed their concepts of the world’s origin and purpose, and of the social ideals a child could pattern himself after. These were the images of the unconquered hero Achilles and wily Odysseus; of Hercules, whose life history showed that it is not beneath the dignity of the strongest man to clean the filthiest stable; of St. Martin, who cut his coat in half to clothe a poor beggar. It is not just since Freud that the myth of Oedipus has become the image by which we understand the ever new but age-old problems posed to us by our complex and ambivalent feelings about our parents. Freud referred to this ancient story to make us aware of the inescapable cauldron of emotions which every child, in his own way, has to manage at a certain age.

Life Divined from the Inside

In the Hindu civilization, the story of Rama and Sita (part of the *Ramayana*), which tells of their peaceable courage and their passionate devotion to each other, is the prototype of love and marriage relationships. The culture, moreover, enjoins everyone to try to relive this myth in his or her own life; every Hindu bride is called Sita, and as part of her wedding ceremony she acts out certain episodes of the myth.

In a fairy tale, internal processes are externalized and become comprehensible as represented by the figures of the story and its events. This is the reason why in traditional Hindu medicine a fairy tale giving form to his particular problem was offered to a psychically disoriented person, for his meditation. It was expected that through contemplating the story the disturbed person would be led to visualize both the nature of the impasse in living from which he suffered, and the possibility of its resolution. From what a particular tale implied about man’s despair, hopes, and methods of overcoming tribulations, the patient could discover not only a way out of his distress but also a way to find himself, as the hero of the story did.

But the paramount importance of fairy tales for the growing individual resides in something other than teachings about correct ways of behaving in this world—such wisdom is plentifully supplied in religion, myths, and fables. Fairy stories do not pretend to describe the world as it is, nor do they advise what one ought to do. If they did, the Hindu patient would be induced to follow an imposed pattern of behavior—which is not just bad therapy, but the opposite of therapy. The fairy tale is therapeutic because the patient finds his own solutions, through contemplating what the story seems to imply about him and his inner conflicts at this moment in his life. The content of the chosen tale usually has nothing to do with the patient’s external life, but much to do with his inner problems, which seem incomprehensible and hence unsolvable. The fairy tale clearly does not refer to the outer world, although it may begin realistically enough and have everyday features woven into it. The unrealistic nature of these tales (which narrow-minded rationalists object to) is an important device, because it makes obvious that the fairy tales’ concern is not useful information about the external world, but the inner processes taking place in an individual.

In most cultures, there is no clear line separating myth from folk or fairy tale; all these together form the literature of preliterate societies. The Nordic languages have only one word for both: *saga*. German has
retained the word *Sage* for myths, while fairy stories are called *Märchen*. It is unfortunate that both the English and French names for these stories emphasize the role of fairies in them—because in most, no fairies appear. Myths and fairy tales alike attain a definite form only when they are committed to writing and are no longer subject to continuous change. Before being written down, these stories were either condensed or vastly elaborated in the retelling over the centuries; some stories merged with others. All became modified by what the teller thought was of greatest interest to his listeners, by what his concerns of the moment or the special problems of his era were.

Some fairy and folk stories evolved out of myths; others were incorporated into them. Both forms embodied the cumulative experience of a society as men wished to recall past wisdom for themselves and transmit it to future generations. These tales are the purveyors of deep insights that have sustained mankind through the long vicissitudes of its existence, a heritage that is not revealed in any other form as simply and directly, or as accessibly, to children.

Myths and fairy tales have much in common. But in myths, much more than in fairy stories, the culture hero is presented to the listener as a figure he ought to emulate in his own life, as far as possible.

A myth, like a fairy tale, may express an inner conflict in symbolic form and suggest how it may be solved—but this is not necessarily the myth’s central concern. The myth presents its theme in a majestic way; it carries spiritual force; and the divine is present and is experienced in the form of superhuman heroes who make constant demands on mere mortals. Much as we, the mortals, may strive to be like these heroes, we will remain always and obviously inferior to them.

The figures and events of fairy tales also personify and illustrate inner conflicts, but they suggest ever so subtly how these conflicts may be solved, and what the next steps in the development toward a higher humanity might be. The fairy tale is presented in a simple, homely way; no demands are made on the listener. This prevents even the smallest child from feeling compelled to act in specific ways, and he is never made to feel inferior. Far from making demands, the fairy tale reassures, gives hope for the future, and holds out the promise of a happy ending. That is why Lewis Carroll called it a “love-gift” —a term hardly applicable to a myth.*

*Child of the pure unclouded brow
And dreaming eyes of wonder!
Though time be fleet, and I and thou

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*Life Divined from the Inside*

Obviously, not every story contained in a collection called “Fairy Tales” meets these criteria. Many of these stories are simply diversions, cautionary tales, or fables. If they are fables, they tell by means of words, actions, or events—whether or not they might be—what one ought to do. Fables demand and threaten—they are moralistic—or they just entertain. To decide whether a story is a fairy tale or something entirely different, one might ask whether it could rightly be called a love-gift to a child. That is not a bad way to arrive at a classification.

To understand how a child views fairy tales, let us consider as examples the many fairy stories in which a child outwits a giant who scares him or even threatens his life. That children intuitively understand what these “giants” stand for is illustrated by the spontaneous reaction of a five-year-old.

Encouraged by discussion about the importance fairy tales have for children, a mother overcame her hesitation about telling such “gory and threatening” stories to her son. From her conversations with him, she knew that her son already had fantasies about eating people, or people getting eaten. So she told him the tale of “Jack the Giant Killer.” His response at the end of the story was: “There aren’t any such things as giants, are there?” Before the mother could give her son the reassuring reply which was on her tongue—and which would have destroyed the value of the story for him—he continued, “But there are such things as grown-ups, and they’re like giants.” At the ripe old age of five, he understood the encouraging message of the story: although adults can be experienced as frightening giants, a little boy with cunning can get the better of them.

This remark reveals one source of adult reluctance to tell fairy stories: we are not comfortable with the thought that occasionally we look like threatening giants to our children, although we do. Nor do we want to accept how easy they think it is to fool us, or to make fools of us, and how delighted they are by this idea. But whether or not we tell fairy tales to them, we do—as the example of this little boy proves—appear to them as selfish giants who wish to keep to ourselves all the wonderful things which give us power. Fairy stories provide reassur-

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Are half a life aurer,
Thy loving smile will surely hail
The love-gift of a fairy-tale.

C. L. Dodgson (Lewis Carroll), in *Through the Looking-Glass*
ance to children that they can eventually get the better of the giant—i.e., they can grow up to be like the giant and acquire the same powers. These are "the mighty hopes that make us men."  

Most significantly, if we parents tell such fairy stories to our children, we can give them the most important reassurance of all: that we approve of their playing with the idea of getting the better of these giants. Here reading is not the same as being told the story, because while reading alone the child may think that only some stranger—the person who wrote the story or arranged the book—approves of outwitting and cutting down the giant. But when his parents tell him the story, a child can be sure that they approve of his retaliating in fantasy for the threat which adult dominance entails.

"The Fisherman and the Jinny"

FAIRY TALE COMPARED TO FABLE

One of the Arabian Nights tales, "The Fisherman and the Jinny," gives an almost complete rendering of the fairy-tale motif which features a giant in conflict with an ordinary person. This theme is common to all cultures in some form, since children everywhere fear and chafe under the power adults hold over them. (In the West, the theme is best known in the form exemplified by the Brothers Grimm's story "The Spirit in the Bottle.") Children know that, short of doing adults' bidding, they have only one way to be safe from adult wrath: through outwitting them.

"The Fisherman and the Jinny" tells how a poor fisherman casts his net into the sea four times. First he catches a dead jackass, the second time a pitcher full of sand and mud. The third effort gains him less than the preceding ones: potsherds and broken glass. The fourth time around, the fisherman brings up a copper jar. As he opens it, a huge cloud emerges, which materializes into a giant Jinny (genie) that threatens to kill him, despite all the fisherman's entreaties. The fisherman saves himself with his wits: he taunts the Jinny by doubting aloud that the huge Jinny could ever have fitted into such a small vessel; thus he induces the Jinny to return into the jar to prove it. Then the fisherman quickly caps and seals the jar and throws it back into the ocean.

In other cultures the same motif may appear in a version where the evil figure materializes as a big, ferocious animal which threatens to devour the hero, who, except for his cunning, is in no way a match for this adversary. The hero then reflects aloud that it must be easy for such a powerful spirit to take the form of a huge creature, but that it could not possibly turn itself into a little animal, such as a mouse or a bird. This appeal to the vanity of the spirit spells its doom. To show that nothing is impossible to it, the evil spirit transforms itself into the tiny animal, which is then easily vanquished by the hero.

The story of "The Fisherman and the Jinny" is richer in hidden messages than other versions of this fairy-tale motif, as it contains significant details not always found in other renderings. One feature is an account of how the Jinny came to be so ruthless as to wish to kill the person who sets him free; another feature is that three unsuccessful attempts are finally rewarded on the fourth try.

According to adult morality, the longer an imprisonment lasts, the more grateful the prisoner should be to the person who liberates him. But this is not how the Jinny describes it: As he sat confounded in the bottle during the first hundred years, he "said in my heart, 'Who so shall release me, him will I enrich for ever and ever.'" But the full century went by, and when no one set me free, I entered upon the second five score saying: 'Who so shall release me, for him I will open the hoards of the earth.' Still no one set me free, and thus four hundred years passed away. Then quoth I, 'Who so shall release me, for him will I fulfill three wishes.' Yet no one set me free. Thereupon I waxed wroth with exceeding wrath and said to myself, 'Who so shall release me from this time forth, him will I slay...'"

This is exactly how a young child feels when he has been "deserted." First he thinks to himself how happy he will be when his mother comes back; or when sent to his room, how glad he will be when permitted to leave it again, and how he will reward Mother. But as time passes, the child becomes angrier and angrier, and he fantasizes the terrible revenge he will take on those who have deprived him. The fact that, in reality, he may be very happy when reproved does not change how his thoughts move from rewarding to punishing those who have inflicted discomfort on him. Thus, the way the Jinny's thoughts evolve gives the story psychological truth for a child.

An example of this progression of feelings was shown by a three-year-old boy whose parents had gone abroad for several weeks. The
The young child may respond mainly to the motif of sibling rivalry, delighted that Goldilocks must go back from whence she came, as so many children wish the new baby would do. An older child will be enthralled by Goldilocks’ experimentation with adult roles. Children will enjoy her peeping and entering; some adults may like to remind their children that Goldilocks is expelled for it.

The story is particularly timely because it depicts the outsider, Goldilocks, in such appealing form. This makes it as attractive to someone as it is to others because the insiders, the bears, win. Thus, whether one feels like an outsider or an insider, the story can be equally enchanting. The change in title over time shows how a story protecting the property and psychological rights of insiders—the bears—became one which concentrates attention on the outsider. What was once called “The Three Bears” is now known mainly as “Goldilocks.” Further, the story’s ambiguity, which is so much in line with the temper of the times, may also account for its popularity, while the clear-cut solutions of the traditional fairy tale seem to point to a happier age when things were believed to permit definite solutions.

Even more important in this respect is the story’s greatest appeal, which at the same time is its greatest weakness. Not only in modern times, but all through the ages, running away from a problem—which in the unconscious means denying or repressing it—seems the easiest way out when confronted with what seems to be too difficult or unsolvable a predicament. This is the solution with which we are left in “Goldilocks.” The bears seem unmoved by her appearance in and sudden disappearance from their lives. They act as if nothing had happened but an interlude without consequences; all is solved by her jumping out of the window. As far as Goldilocks is concerned, her running away suggests that no solution of the cephalic predicaments or of sibling rivalry is necessary. Contrary to what happens in traditional fairy tales, the impression is that Goldilocks’ experience in the bears’ house made little change in her life as it did in that of the bear family; we hear nothing more about it. Despite her serious exploration of where she is—from implication, of who she is—we are not told that it led to any higher selfhood for Goldilocks.

Parents would like their daughters to remain eternally their little girls, and the child would like to believe that it is possible to evade the struggle of growing up. That is why the spontaneous reaction to “Goldilocks” is “What a lovely story.” But it is also why this story does not help the child to gain emotional maturity.

Adolescence is a period of great and rapid change, characterized by periods of utter passivity and lethargy alternating with frantic activity, even dangerous behavior to “prove oneself” or discharge inner tension. This back-and-forth adolescent behavior finds expression in some fairy tales by the hero’s rushing after adventures and then suddenly being turned to stone by some enchantment. More often, and psychologically more correctly, the sequence is reversed: Dummy in “The Three Feathers” does nothing until he is well into adolescence; and the hero of “The Three Languages,” pushed by his father to go abroad to develop himself, spends three years in passive learning before his adventures begin.

While many fairy tales stress great deeds the heroes must perform to become themselves, “The Sleeping Beauty” emphasizes the long, quiet concentration on oneself that is also needed. During the months before the first menstruation, and often also for some time immediately following it, girls are passive, seem sleepy, and withdraw into themselves. While no equally noticeable state heralds the coming of sexual maturity in boys, many of them experience a period of lassitude and of turning inward during puberty which equals the female experience. It is thus understandable that a fairy story in which a long period of sleep begins at the start of puberty has been very popular for a long time among girls and boys.

In major life changes such as adolescence, for successful growth opportunities both active and quiescent periods are needed. The turning inward, which in outer appearance looks like passivity (or sleeping one’s life away), happens when internal mental processes of such importance go on within the person that he has no energy for outwardly directed action. Those fairy tales which, like “The Sleeping Beauty,” have the period of passivity for their central topic, permit the budding adolescent not to worry during his inactive period: he learns that things continue to evolve. The happy ending assures the child that he will not remain permanently stuck in seemingly doing nothing, even if at the moment it seems as if this period of quietude will last for a hundred years.

After the period of inactivity which typically occurs during early
puberty, adolescents become active and make up for the period of passivity; in real life and in fairy tales they try to prove their young manhood or womanhood, often through dangerous adventures. This is how the symbolic language of the fairy tale states that after having gathered strength in solitude they now have to become themselves. Actually, this development is fraught with dangers: an adolescent must leave the security of childhood, which is represented by getting lost in the dangerous forest; learn to face up to his violent tendencies and anxieties, symbolized by encounters with wild animals or dragons; get to know himself, which is implied in meeting strange figures and experiences. Through this process the adolescent loses a previous innocence suggested by their having been “Simpleton,” considered dumb and lowly, or merely somebody’s child. The risks involved in bold adventures are obvious, as when Jack meets the ogre. “Snow White” and “The Sleeping Beauty” encourage the child not to be afraid of the dangers of passivity. Ancient as “The Sleeping Beauty” is, in many ways it has a more important message for today’s youth than many other tales. Presently many of our young people—and their parents—are fearful of quiet growth, when nothing seems to happen, because of a common belief that only doing what can be seen achieves goals. “The Sleeping Beauty” tells that a long period of quiescence, of contemplation, of concentration on the self, can and often does lead to highest achievement.

Recently it has been claimed that the struggle against childhood dependency and for becoming oneself in fairy tales is frequently described differently for the girl than for the boy, and that this is the result of sexual stereotyping. Fairy tales do not render such one-sided pictures. Even when a girl is depicted as turning inward in her struggle to become herself, and a boy as aggressively dealing with the external world, these two together symbolize the two ways in which one has to gain selfhood: through learning to understand and master the inner as well as the outer world. In this sense the male and female heroes are again projections onto two different figures of two (artificially) separated aspects of one and the same process which everybody has to undergo in growing up. While some literal-minded parents do not realize it, children know that, whatever the sex of the hero, the story pertains to their own problems.

Male and female figures appear in the same roles in fairy tales; in “The Sleeping Beauty” it is the prince who observes the sleeping girl, but in “Cupid and Psyche” and the many tales derived from it, it is Psyche who apprehends Cupid in his sleep and, like the prince, mar-
kids, which the queen served to the king. A while later the queen sent for Talia and planned to have her thrown into the fire because she was the reason for the king’s infidelity. At the last minute the king arrived, had his wife thrown into the fire, married Talia, and was happy to find his children, whom the king had saved. The story ends with the verses:

Lucky people, so 'tis said,
Are blessed by Fortune whilst in bed.*

Perrault, by adding on his own the story of the slighted fairy, or by using this familiar fairy-tale motif, explains why the heroine falls into deathlike sleep and thus enriches the story, since in “Sun, Moon, and Talia” we are given no reason why this should be her fate.

In Basile’s story Talia is the daughter of a king who loved her so much that he could not remain in his castle after she fell into a deathlike sleep. We hear nothing more about him after he left Talia ensconced on her throne-like chair “under an embroidered canopy,” not even after she reawakened, married her king, and lived happily with him and her beautiful children. One king replaces another king in the same country; one king replaces another in Talia’s life—the father king is replaced by the lover king. Might these two kings not be substitutes for each other at different periods in the girl’s life, in different roles, in different disguises? We encounter here again the “innocence” of the oedipal child, who feels no responsibility for what she arouses or wishes to arouse in the parent.

Perrault, the academicians, doubly distances his story from Basile’s. He was, after all, a courtier who told stories for the perusal of princes, pretending that they were invented by his little son to please a princess. The two kings are changed into a king and a prince, the latter somebody who obviously is not yet married and has no children. And

*Since Talia’s children are called the sun and moon, there is the possibility that Basile was influenced by the story of Leto, one of the many loves of Zeus, who bore him Apollo and Artemis, the sun god and the moon goddess. If so, we may assume that, as Hera was jealous of those whom Zeus loved, the queen in this tale is a distant memory of Hera and her jealousies.

Most fairy tales of the Western world have at some time included Christian elements, so much so that an account of those underlying Christian meanings would make another book. In this tale Talia, who does not know that she has had intercourse or that she has conceived, has done so without pleasure and without sin. This she has in common with the Virgin Mary, as she, like the Virgin, in such manner becomes the mother of God(s).

The presence of the king is separated from the prince by a sleep of one hundred years, so that we can feel certain that the two have nothing in common. Interestingly enough, Perrault does not quite manage to extricate himself from the oedipal connotations: in his story the queen is not insanely jealous because of the betrayal by her husband, but she appears as the oedipal mother who is so jealous of the girl her son the prince falls in love with that she seeks to destroy her. But while the queen in Basile’s tale is convincing, Perrault’s queen is not. His story falls into two incongruous parts: a first which ends with the prince’s awakening Sleeping Beauty and marrying her; followed by a second part in which we are suddenly told that the mother of Prince Charm is really a child-devouring ogress who wishes to eat her own grandchild.

In Basile, the queen wishes to feed his children to her husband—the most terrible punishment for preferring Sleeping Beauty to her that she can think of. In Perrault, she wants to eat them herself. In Basile, the queen is jealous because her husband’s mind and love are entirely taken up with Talia and her children. The king’s wife tries to burn Talia in the fire—the king’s “burning” love for Talia having aroused the queen’s “burning” hatred for her.

There is no explanation for the cannibalistic hatred of the queen in Perrault’s tale but that she is an ogress who “whenever she saw little children passing by, . . . had all the difficulty in the world to avoid falling upon them.” Also, Prince Charm keeps his marriage to Sleeping Beauty a secret for two years, until his father dies. Only then does he bring Sleeping Beauty and her two children, called Morning and Day, to his castle. And although he knows that his mother is an ogress, when he leaves to go to war he puts her in charge, entrusting his kingdom and wife and children to her. Perrault’s story ends with the king returning at the moment when his mother is just about to have Sleeping Beauty thrown into a pit full of vipers. On his arrival the ogress, who sees her plans spoiled, jumps into the pit herself.

It can easily be understood that Perrault did not feel it appropriate to tell at the French court a story in which a married king ravishes a sleeping maiden, gets her with child, forgets it entirely, and remembers her after a time only by chance. But a fairy prince who keeps his marriage and fatherhood a secret from his father-king—shall we assume because he fears the king’s oedipal jealousy if the son also becomes a father—is unconvincing, if for no other reason than that oedipal jealousy of mother and father in regard to the same son in the same tale is overdoing it, even in a fairy story. Knowing his mother
is an ogress, the prince does not bring his wife and child home as long as his good father may exercise a restraining influence, but only after his death, when such protection is no longer available. The reason for all this is not that Perrault was lacking in artistry, but that he did not take his fairy stories seriously and was most intent on the cute or moralistic verse ending he appended to each.*

With two such incongruous parts to this story, it is understandable that in oral telling—and often also in printed form—the story ends with the happy union of the prince and Sleeping Beauty. It is this form that the Brothers Grimm heard and recorded, and which was then and is now most widely known. Still, something got lost which was present in Perrault. To wish death to a newborn child only because one is not invited to the christening or is given inferior silverware is the mark of an evil fairy. Thus, in Perrault, as in the Brothers Grimm’s version, at the very beginning of the story we find the (fairy god)-mother(s) split into the good and the evil aspects. The happy ending requires that the evil principle be appropriately punished and done away with; only then can the good, and with it happiness, prevail. In Perrault, as in Basile, the evil principle is done away with, and thus fairy-story justice is done. But the Brothers Grimm’s version, which will be followed from here on, is deficient because the evil fairy is not punished.

However, great the variations in detail, the central theme of all versions of “The Sleeping Beauty” is that, despite all attempts on the part of parents to prevent their child’s sexual awakening, it will take place nonetheless. Furthermore, parents’ ill-advised efforts may post-

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Such remarks, in which Perrault indiscriminately mixes petty rationality with fairy-story fantasy, greatly detract from his work. The dress detail, for example, destroys that mythical, allegorical, and psychological time which is suggested by the hundred years of sleep by making it a specific chronological time. It makes it all frivolous—not like the legends of saints who awake from a hundred years of sleep, recognize how the world has changed, and immediately turn into dust. By such details, which were meant to amuse, Perrault destroyed the feeling of timelessness that is an important element in the effectiveness of fairy tales.

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pen the reaching of maturity at the proper time, as symbolized by Sleeping Beauty’s hundred years of sleep, which separate her sexual awakening from her being united with her lover. Closely related to this is a different motif—namely, that to have to wait even a long time for sexual fulfillment does not at all detract from its beauty.

Perrault’s and the Brothers Grimm’s versions begin by indicating that one may have to wait a long time to find sexual fulfillment, as indicated by having a child. For a very long time, we are told, the king and his queen wished for a child in vain. In Perrault, the parents behave like his contemporaries: “They went to all the waters in the world; volks, pilgrimages, everything was tried and nothing came of it. At last, however, the Queen was with child.” The Brothers Grimm’s beginning is much more fairy-tale-like: “Once upon a time was a king and a queen who said every day ‘Oh, if we only had a child!’ but they never got one. Once when the queen sat in the bath, it happened that a frog crawled out of the water on the land and told her ‘Your wish will be fulfilled; before a year is over, you’ll bring a daughter into the world.’” The frog’s saying that the queen will give birth before a year is over puts the time of waiting close to the nine months of pregnancy. This, plus the queen’s being in her bath, is reason to believe that conception took place on the occasion of the frog’s visit to the queen. (Why in fairy tales the frog often symbolizes sexual fulfillment is discussed later, in connection with the story “The Frog King.”)

The parents’ long wait for a child which finally arrives conveys that there is no need to hurry toward sex; it loses none of its rewards if one has to wait a long time for it. The good fairies and their wishes at the christening actually have little to do with the plot, except to contrast with the curse of the fairy who feels slighted. This may be seen from the fact that the number of fairies varies from country to country, from three to eight to thirteen. * The good fairies’ gifts of endowment to the child also differ in the different versions, while the curse of the evil one is always the same: the girl (in the Brothers Grimm’s story

*In the Anciennes Chroniques de Poreforest of the fourteenth century (printed for the first time in France in 1529) three goddesses are invited to the celebration of the birth of Zellandine. Lucena confers health on her; Themis, angry because there is no knife beside her plate, utters the curse that while spinning Zellandine will pull a thread off the distaff and push it into her finger; she will have to sleep until it is pulled out. Venus, the third goddess, promises to arrange for the rescue to happen. In Perrault, there are seven invited fairies and one uninvited, who utters the well-known curse. In the Brothers Grimm’s story there are twelve benevolent fairies and one malevolent one.
when she is fifteen) will prick her finger on a distaff (of a spinning wheel) and die. The last good fairy is able to change this threat of death into a hundred years' sleep. The message is similar to that of "Snow White": what may seem like a period of deathlike passivity at the end of childhood is nothing but a time of quiet growth and preparation, from which the person will awaken mature, ready for sexual union. It must be stressed that in fairy tales this union is as much one of the minds and souls of two partners as it is one of sexual fulfillment.

In times past, fifteen was often the age at which menstruation began. The thirteen fairies in the Brothers Grimm's story are reminiscent of the thirteen lunar months into which the year was once, in ancient times, divided. While this symbolism may be lost on those not familiar with the lunar year, it is well known that menstruation typically occurs with the twenty-eight-day frequency of lunar months, and not with the twelve months which our year is divided into. Thus, the number of twelve good fairies plus a thirteenth evil one indicates symbolically that the fatal "curse" refers to menstruation.

It is very much to the point that the king, the male, does not understand the necessity of menstruation and tries to prevent his daughter from experiencing the fatal bleeding. The queen, in all versions of the story, seems unconcerned with the prediction of the angry fairy. In any case, she knows better than to try to prevent it. The curse centers on the distaff, a word which in English has come to stand for female in general. While the same is not true for the French (Perrault) or German (Brothers Grimm) word for distaff, until fairly recently spinning and weaving were considered as characteristically "woman's" occupations.

All the king's painstaking efforts to forestall the "curse" of the malicious fairy fail. Removing all the distaffs from the kingdom cannot prevent the girl's fateful bleeding once she reaches puberty; at fifteen, as the evil fairy predicted. Whatever precautions a father takes, when the daughter is ripe for it, puberty will set in. The temporary absence of both parents when this event occurs symbolizes all parents' incapacity to protect their child against the various growing-up crises which every human being has to undergo.

As she becomes an adolescent, the girl explores the formerly inaccessible areas of existence, as represented by the hidden chamber where an old woman is spinning. At this point the story abounds in Freudian symbolism. As she approaches the fateful place, the girl ascends a circular staircase; in dreams such staircases typically stand for sexual experiences. At the top of this staircase she finds a small door and in its lock a key. As she turns the key, the door "springs open" and the girl enters a small room in which an old woman spins. A small locked room often stands in dreams for the female sexual organs; turning a key in a lock often symbolizes intercourse.

Seeing the old woman spinning, the girl asks: "What kind of thing is this that jumps about so funny?" It does not take much imagination to see the possible sexual connotations in the distaff, but as soon as the girl touches it, she pricks her finger, and falls into sleep.

The main associations this tale arouses in the child's unconscious are to menstruation rather than intercourse. In common language, referring also to its Biblical origin, menstruation is often called the "curse"; and it is a female's—the fairy's—curse that causes the bleeding. Second, the age at which this curse is to become effective is about the age at which, in past times, menstruation most frequently set in. Finally, the bleeding comes about through an encounter with an old woman, not a man; and according to the Bible, the curse is inherited by woman from woman.

Bleeding, as in menstruation, is for the young girl (and for the young man too, in a different manner) an overwhelming experience if she is not emotionally ready for it. Overcome by the experience of sudden bleeding, the princess falls into a long sleep, protected against all suitors—i.e., premature sexual encounters—by an impenetrable wall of thorns. While the most familiar version stresses in the name "The Sleeping Beauty" the long sleep of the heroine, the titles of other variants give prominence to the protective wall, such as the English "Briar Rose."

Many princes try to reach Sleeping Beauty before her time of maturing is over; all these precocious suitors perish in the thorns. This is a warning to child and parents that sexual arousal before mind and body are ready for it is very destructive. But when Sleeping Beauty has finally gained both physical and emotional maturity and is ready for love, and with it for sex and marriage, then that which had seemed impenetrable gives way. The wall of thorns suddenly turns into a wall of big, beautiful flowers, which opens to let the prince enter. The implied message is the same as in many other fairy tales: don't worry and don't try to hurry things—when the time is ripe, the impossible problem will be solved, as if by itself.

The long sleep of the beautiful maiden has also other connotations.

*The German name of girl and tale, "Dornröschchen," emphasizes both the hedge of thorns and the (briar) rose. The diminutive form of "rose" in the German name stresses the girl's immaturity, which must be protected by the wall of thorns.
Whether it is Snow White in her glass coffin or Sleeping Beauty on her bed, the adolescent dream of everlasting youth and perfection is just that: a dream. The alteration of the original curse, which threatened death, to one of prolonged sleep suggests that the two are not all that different. If we do not want to change and develop, then we might as well remain in a deathlike sleep. During their sleep the heroines' beauty is a frigid one; theirs is the isolation of narcissism. In such self-involvement which excludes the rest of the world there is no suffering, but also no knowledge to be gained, no feelings to be experienced.

Any transition from one stage of development to the next is fraught with dangers; those of puberty are symbolized by the shedding of blood on touching the distaff. A natural reaction to the threat of having to grow up is to withdraw from a world and life which impose such difficulties. Narcissistic withdrawal is a tempting reaction to the stresses of adolescence, but, the story warns, it leads to a dangerous, deathlike existence when it is embraced as an escape from the vagaries of life. The entire world then becomes dead to the person; this is the symbolic meaning, and warning, of the deathlike sleep into which everybody surrounding Sleeping Beauty falls. The world becomes alive only to the person who herself awakens to it. Only relating positively to the other "awakens" us from the danger of sleeping away our life. The kiss of the prince breaks the spell of narcissism and awakens a womanhood which up to then has remained undeveloped. Only if the maiden grows into woman can life go on.

The harmonious meeting of prince and princess, their awakening to each other, is a symbol of what maturity implies: not just harmony within oneself, but also with the other. It depends on the listener whether the arrival of the prince at the right time is interpreted as the event which causes sexual awakening or the birth of a higher ego; the child probably comprehends both these meanings.

Awakening from a long sleep will be understood differently by the child depending on his age. The younger child will see in it mainly an awakening to his selfhood, the achievement of concordance between what had been his inner chaotic tendencies—that is, an attaining of inner harmony between his id, ego, and superego.

After the child has experienced this meaning until he reaches puberty, in adolescence he will gain additional understanding of the same fairy tale. Then it becomes also an image of achieving harmony with the other, as represented by a person of the other sex, so that the two, as told at the end of "The Sleeping Beauty," may live enjoyably together till their end. This, the most desirable goal of life, seems to be the most significant communication which fairy stories transmit to the older child. It is symbolized by an ending in which the prince and princess find each other "and they lived happily until their death."

Only after one has attained inner harmony within oneself can one hope to find it in relations with others. A preconscious understanding of the connection between the two stages is gained by the child through his own developmental experiences.

The story of Sleeping Beauty impresses every child that a traumatic event—such as the girl's bleeding at the beginning of puberty, and later, in first intercourse—does have the happiest consequences. The story implants the idea that such events must be taken very seriously, but that one need not be afraid of them. The "curse" is a blessing in disguise.

One more look at the earliest known form of the motif of "The Sleeping Beauty" in Persephone some six hundred years ago: it is Venus, the goddess of love, who arranges for the sleeping girl's awakening by having her baby suck the splinter out of her finger, and the same happens in Basile's story. Full self-fulfilment of the female does not come with menstruation. Female completeness is not achieved when falling in love, not even in intercourse, nor in childbirth, since the heroines in Persephone and in Basile's story sleep all through it. These are necessary steps on the way to ultimate maturity; but complete selfhood comes only with having given life, and with nurturing the one whom one has brought into being: with the baby sucking from the mother's body. Thus, these stories enumerate experiences which pertain only to the female; she must undergo them all before she reaches the summit of femininity.

It is the infant's sucking the splinter out from under the mother's nail which brings her back to life—a symbol that her child is not just the passive recipient of what the mother gives to him, but that he also actively renders her great service. Her nurturing permits him to do so; but it is his nursing from which he reawakens her to life—a being reborn, which, as always in fairy tales, symbolizes the achievement of a higher mental state. Thus, the fairy tale tells parent and child alike that the infant not only receives from his mother, but also gives to her. While she gives him life, he adds a new dimension to her life. The self-involvement which was suggested by the heroine's long-lasting sleep comes to an end as she gives to the infant and he, by taking from her, restores her to the highest level of existence: a mutuality in which the one who receives life also gives life.
In "The Sleeping Beauty" this is further emphasized because not only she but her entire world—her parents, all inhabitants of the castle—returns to life the moment she does. If we are insensitive to the world, the world ceases to exist for us. When Sleeping Beauty fell asleep, so did the world for her. The world awakens anew as a child is nurtured into it, because only in this way can humanity continue to exist.

This symbolism got lost in the story's later forms which end with the awakening of Sleeping Beauty, and with it her world, to a new life. Even in the shortened form in which the tale came down to us, in which Sleeping Beauty is awakened by the kiss of the prince, we feel—without it being spelled out as in the more ancient versions—that she is the incarnation of perfect femininity.

**"CINDERELLA"**

By all accounts, "Cinderella" is the best-known fairy tale, and probably also the best-liked. It is quite an old story; when first written down in China during the ninth century A.D., it already had a history. The unrivaled tiny foot size as a mark of extraordinary virtue, distinction, and beauty, and the slipper made of precious material are facets which point to an Eastern, if not necessarily Chinese, origin.* The modern hearer does not connect sexual attractiveness and beauty in general with extreme smallness of the foot, as the ancient Chinese did, in accordance with their practice of binding women's feet.

"Cinderella," as we know it, is experienced as a story about the agonies and hopes which form the essential content of sibling rivalry; and about the degraded heroine winning out over her siblings who abused her. Long before Perrault gave "Cinderella" the form in which it is now widely known, "having to live among the ashes" was a symbol of being debased in comparison to one's siblings, irrespective of sex. In Germany, for example, there were stories in which such an ash-boy later becomes king, which parallels Cinderella's fate. "Aschenputtel" is the title of the Brothers Grimm's version of the tale.

*Artistically made slippers of precious material were reported in Egypt from the third century on. The Roman emperor Diocletian in a decree of A.D. 301 set maximum prices for different kinds of footwear, including slippers made of fine Babylonian leather, dyed purple or scarlet, and gilded slippers for women.8

"Cinderella"

The term originally designated a lowly, dirty kitchenmaid who must tend to the fireplace ashes.

There are many examples in the German language of how being forced to dwell among the ashes was a symbol not just of degradation, but also of sibling rivalry, and of the sibling who finally surpasses the brother or brothers who have debased him. Martin Luther in his *Table Talks* speaks about Cain as the God-forsaken evilbrother who is powerful, while pious Abel is forced to be his ash-brother (Aschebrädel), a mere nothing, subject to Cain; in one of Luther’s sermons he says that Esau was forced into the role of Jacob’s ash-brother.9 Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau are Biblical examples of one brother being suppressed or destroyed by the other.

The fairy tale replaces sibling relations with relations between step-siblings—perhaps a device to explain and make acceptable an animosity which one wishes would not exist among true siblings. Although sibling rivalry is universal and "natural" in the sense that it is the negative consequence of being a sibling, this same relation also generates equally as much positive feeling between siblings, highlighted in fairy tales such as "Brother and Sister."

No other fairy tale renders so well as the "Cinderella" stories the inner experiences of the young child in the throes of sibling rivalry, when he feels hopelessly outclassed by his brothers and sisters. Cinderella is pushed down and degraded by her stepsisters; her interests are sacrificed to theirs by her (step)mother; she is expected to do the dirtiest work and although she performs it well, she receives no credit for it; only more is demanded of her. This is how the child feels when devastated by the miseries of sibling rivalry. Exaggerated though Cinderella’s tribulations and degradations may seem to the adult, the child carried away by sibling rivalry feels, "That’s me; that’s how they mistreat me, or would want to; that’s how little they think of me." And there are moments—often long time periods—when for inner reasons a child feels this way even when his position among his siblings may seem to give him no cause for it.

When a story corresponds to how the child feels deep down—as no realistic narrative is likely to do—it attains an emotional quality of "truth" for the child. The events of "Cinderella" offer him vivid images that give body to his overwhelming but nevertheless often vague and nondescript emotions; so these episodes seem more convincing to him than his life experiences.

The term “sibling rivalry” refers to a most complex constellation of feelings and their causes. With extremely rare exceptions, the emo-
them; many people have felt the same way. But as the story characters discover that despite such anxiety their sexual partner is not an ugly creature but a lovely person, so will the child. On a preconscious level these tales convey to the child that much of his anxiety is implanted in him by what he has been told; and that matters may be quite different when one experiences them directly, from the way one sees them from the outside.

On another level, the stories seem to tell that throwing light on these matters, while it may demonstrate that one's anxiety was unfounded, does not solve the problem. This takes time—trying to do it prematurely only postpones it all—and, most of all, is hard work. To overcome sexual anxieties, one must grow as a person, and unfortunately much of this growth can be achieved only through suffering.

One obvious lesson of these stories may be less important today than in times past when the pattern was that the male had to woo the female—as the pig comes wooing from afar to win the princess, and the great white bear has to make all kinds of promises to win his bride. This, the stories tell, is not sufficient for a happy marriage. The female has to exert herself as much as the male; she has to pursue him actively as much as he pursues her, maybe even more so.

Other psychological subtleties of these stories may be lost on the hearer, but they may impress him subconsciously and thus make him sensitive to typical difficulties which, when not understood, may create hardships in the relations between people. For example, when the pig deliberately rolls itself in the mud and then asks its bride to kiss it, such behavior is typical of the person who fears that he is not acceptable and tests this by making himself appear worse than he is, because only when he is accepted under the worst appearance can he feel secure. Thus, in the stories of the animal husband the male's anxieties that his coarseness will turn off the female are juxtaposed with her anxieties about the bestial nature of sex.

Quite different is the detail which permits the bride of the enchanted pig to become reunited with her husband. To make the last step necessary for this, she has to cut off her little finger. It is her final, most personal sacrifice, her "key" to her happiness. Since nothing in the story suggests that her hand remained crippled or that she bled, hers is clearly a symbolic sacrifice, suggesting that in a successful marriage the relationship is more important even than the complete integrity of the body.119

This still leaves undiscovered the meaning of the secret room which must not be entered lest calamity result. This is best considered in connection with much more tragic consequences which follow from similar transgressions in other stories.

"BLUEBEARD"

Bluebeard is the most monstrous and beastly of all fairy-tale husbands. Actually this story is not a fairy tale, because with the single exception of the indelible blood on the key which gives away the fact that Bluebeard's bride has entered the forbidden room, there is nothing magical or supernatural in the story. More important, there is no development of any of the characters; although evil is punished in the end, this in itself makes neither for recovery nor for consolation. "Bluebeard" is a story invented by Perrault for which there are no direct antecedents in folk tales as far as we know.121

There are quite a few fairy tales with the central motif of a secret chamber which must not be entered, where previously killed women are preserved. In some Russian and Scandinavian tales of this sort it is an animal husband who forbids entering the room, suggesting a relation between the animal-groom stories and those of the "Bluebeard" type. Among the better known of these fairy tales are the English "Mr. Fox" and the Brothers Grimm's "Fitcher's Bird."121

In "Fitcher's Bird" a sorcerer carries off the eldest of three daughters. He tells her that she may enter all rooms of the house with the exception of one, which can be opened only by the smallest of the keys. This room she must avoid on pain of death. The sorcerer further entrusts the girl with an egg, which she is always to carry with her, because great misfortune will ensue should she lose it. The girl enters the forbidden room and finds it full of blood and dead people. In her fright she drops the egg, and the blood which gets on it cannot be wiped off. The egg gives her away on the return of the sorcerer, who then kills her like the others. Next he gets hold of the middle sister, whose fate is the same.

The youngest daughter is finally carried off by the wizard to his house. But she tricks him by putting the egg away carefully before she goes exploring. Positioning the limbs of her sisters together, she restores them to life. On his return, the sorcerer believes her to have been faithful and tells her that as a reward she will be his bride. She tricks him once more, this time into carrying her sisters and a lot of gold to her parents. Then she glues feathers all over her body so that she looks like a strange bird—hence the story's title—and in this way
escapes. In the end the wizard and all his friends are burned to death. In fairy tales of this type there is full recovery of the victims, and the villain is not a human being.

"Bluebeard" and "Fitcher's Bird" are considered here because these stories present the motif that as a test of trustworthiness, the female must not inquire into the secrets of the male. Carried away by her curiosity, she does so nevertheless, with calamitous consequences. In "The Enchanted Pig" the three daughters invade the forbidden room and find the book containing an account of their future. "The Enchanted Pig" has this feature in common with stories of the "Bluebeard" type, so we will consider these stories together, to help clarify the significance of this motif of the forbidden room.

In "The Enchanted Pig" knowledge about marriage is found in the book kept in the room which the sisters are told not to enter. That the forbidden information about marriage suggests that it is carnal knowledge their father forbade them to acquire—as even today certain books containing sexual information are withheld from the young.

Whether it is Bluebeard or the sorcerer in "Fitcher's Bird," it seems clear that when the male gives the female a key to a room, while at the same time instructing her not to enter, it is a test of her faithfulness to his orders or, in a broader sense, to him. Then these males pretend to depart or do depart for a while, to test their partner's fidelity. Returning unexpectedly, they find that their confidence has been betrayed. The nature of the betrayal may be guessed by the punishment: execution. In certain parts of the world in times past, only one form of deception on the female's part was punishable by death inflicted by her husband: sexual infidelity.

With this thought, let us consider what gives the woman away. In "Fitcher's Bird" it is an egg, in "Bluebeard" a key. In both stories these are magic objects in the sense that once they are touched by blood, the blood cannot be washed off them. The motif of blood that cannot be washed off is an ancient one. Wherever it occurs, it is a sign that some evil deed, usually murder, was committed. The egg is a symbol of female sexuality which, so it seems, the girls in "Fitcher's Bird" are to preserve unspoiled. The key that opens the door to a secret room suggests associations to the male sexual organ, particularly in first intercourse when the hymen is broken and blood gets on it. If this is one of the hidden meanings, then it makes sense that the blood cannot be washed away: defloration is an irreversible event.

In "Fitcher's Bird" the faithfulness of the girls is tested before they have gotten married. The sorcerer plans to marry the youngest daughter because she is able to fool him into believing that she has not disobeyed him. In Perrault's "Bluebeard" we are told that as soon as Bluebeard left for his pretended trip, a great festivity took place; visitors came who did not dare enter the house when its master was at home. It is left to our imagination what went on between the woman and her guests with Bluebeard away, but the story makes it clear that everybody had a high time. The blood on the egg and the key seems to symbolize that the woman had sexual relations. Therefore we can understand her anxious fantasy which depicts corpses of women who had been killed for having been similarly unfaithful.

On hearing any of these stories, it immediately becomes obvious that the female is strongly tempted to do what is forbidden to her. It is hard to imagine any more effective way to seduce a person than to tell her: "I am going away; in my absence you may inspect all rooms but one. Here is the key to the forbidden room, which you are not to use." Thus on one level which is easily obscured by the gruesome details of the story, "Bluebeard" is a tale about sexual temptation.

On another level which is much more obvious, "Bluebeard" is a tale about the destructive aspects of sex. But if one thinks over the story's events for a moment, strange discrepancies become apparent. For example, in Perrault's tale, after her gruesome discovery, Bluebeard's wife does not call for help from any of the many guests who, according to the story, must still be around. She does not confide in her sister Anne, nor seek her help; all she asks of Anne is to look out for her brothers, who are to come on that day. Finally, Bluebeard's wife does not choose what would seem the most obvious course of action: to run for safety, or hide, or disguise herself. This is exactly what happens in "Fitcher's Bird" and in a parallel fairy story of the Brothers Grimm, "The Robber Bridegroom," in which the girl first hides, then escapes, and finally tricks the murderous robbers into coming to a feast, during which they are unmasked. The behavior of Bluebeard's bride suggests two possibilities: that what she sees in the forbidden closet is the creation of her own anxious fantasies; or that she has betrayed her husband, but hopes he won't find out.

Whether or not these interpretations are valid, there is no doubt that "Bluebeard" is a story which gives body to two not necessarily
related emotions which are by no means alien to the child: First, jealous love, when one wishes so badly to keep one’s beloveds forever that one is even ready to destroy them so that they cannot change loyalties. And second, sexual feelings can be terribly fascinating and tempting, but also very dangerous.

It is easy to ascribe “Bluebeard’s” popularity to the combination of crime and sex, or the fascination which sexual crimes hold. To the child, I believe part of the attraction of the story is that it confirms his idea that adults have terrible sexual secrets. It also states what the child knows only too well from his own experience: to find out about sexual secrets is so tempting that even adults are willing to run the greatest risks imaginable. Further, the person who so tempts others deserves a fitting punishment.

I believe that on a preconscious level the child understands from the indelible blood on the key and from other details that Bluebeard’s wife has committed a sexual indiscretion. The story tells that although a jealous husband may believe a wife deserves to be severely punished—even killed—for this, he is absolutely wrong in such thoughts. To fall into temptation, the story clearly tells, is most human. And the jealous person who believes he can take things into his own hands and acts on this conviction deserves to be killed. Marital infidelity, symbolically expressed by the blood on the egg or the key, is something to be forgiven. If the partner does not understand this, it is he who will suffer for it.

Grim as the story is, this analysis suggests that “Bluebeard,” like all fairy stories—although, as mentioned before, it does not really fall into this category—teaches deep down a higher morality or humanity. The person who seeks cruel revenge for infidelity is deservedly undone, as is one who experiences sex only in its destructive aspects. That this more humane morality which understands and forgives sexual transgressions is the most significant aspect of this story is, for once, expressed in the second “morality” which Perrault appended to it. He writes: “One can well see that this is a story of times past; there are no longer such terrible husbands who demand the impossible; even when they are dissatisfied or jealous, they act gently toward their wives.”

However one interprets “Bluebeard,” it is a cautionary tale which warns: Women, don’t give in to your sexual curiosity; men, don’t permit yourself to be carried away by your anger at being sexually betrayed. There is nothing subtle about it; most of all, no development toward higher humanity is projected. At the end, the protagonists, both Bluebeard and his wife, are exactly the same persons they were before. Earth-shaking events have taken place in the story and nobody is the better for them, except possibly the world because Bluebeard no longer exists in it.

How a true folk fairy tale elaborates the motif of the room one is forbidden to enter but which one opens despite such warning can be seen from a large group of tales—for example, the Brothers Grimm’s “Our Lady’s Child.” When the girl is fourteen—the age of sexual maturation—she is given keys which unlock all rooms, but is told not to enter one of them. Tempted by her curiosity, she opens its door. Later she denies that she has done so, despite repeated questioning. As punishment she is robbed of the ability to speak, since she has misused it in lying. She suffers many severe trials, and finally she admits that she has lied. Her speech is restored to her and all is well again, because “whoever repents his sins and confesses will be forgiven.”

**“BEAUTY AND THE BEAST”**

“Bluebeard” is a story about the dangerous propensities of sex, about its strange secrets and close connection with violent and destructive emotions; in short, about those dark aspects of sex which might well be kept hidden behind a permanently locked door, securely controlled. That which happens in “Bluebeard” has nothing whatsoever to do with love. Bluebeard, bent on having his will and possessing his partner, cannot love anybody, but neither can anyone love him.

Despite the title, there is nothing so beastly in the fairy tale of “Beauty and the Beast.” Beauty’s father is menaced by the Beast, but one knows right from the start that it is an empty threat, designed to gain first Beauty’s company, eventually her love, and with it deliverance from an animal-like appearance. In this story all is gentleness and loving devotion to one another on the part of the three main characters: Beauty, her father, and the Beast. Cruel and destructive as the oedipal love of Aphrodite for her son is in the myth which begins the history of this fairy-tale cycle, the oedipal love of Beauty for her father, when transferred to her future husband, is wonderfully healing, in the fairy tale which is the final apotheosis of this cycle.

The following summary of “Beauty and the Beast” is based on Madame Leprince de Beaumont’s rendering of the story published in 1757, which draws on an earlier French version of the motif by