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The Uses of Enchantment

THE MEANING AND IMPORTANCE OF FAIRY TALES

BRUNO BETTELHEIM

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The Uses of Enchantment

Bruno Bettelheim was born in Vienna in 1903 and received his doctorate at the University of Vienna. He came to America in 1939. For many years he was Distinguished Professor of Education and Professor of Psychology and Psychiatry at the University of Chicago. His books include *Love Is Not Enough*, *Symbolic Wounds*, *Truants from Life*, *The Informed Heart*, *Paul and Mary*, *Dialogues with Mothers*, *Social Change and Prejudice* (with M. B. Janowitz), *The Empty Fortress*, *Children of the Dream*, *A Home for the Heart*, *Surviving and Other Essays*, *On Learning to Read* (with Karen Zelan), *Freud and Man's Soul*, and *A Good Enough Parent*. In 1977 he won both the National Book Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award for *The Uses of Enchantment*. Bettelheim died in 1990.

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Freud and Man's Soul

Freud's Vienna and Other Essays

A Good Enough Parent

**THE USES
OF
ENCHANTMENT**

*The Meaning and Importance
of Fairy Tales*

Bruno Bettelheim



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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 evaded 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 be 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 relieving preconscious and unconscious pressures. As the stories unfold, they give conscious credence and body to id pressures and show ways to satisfy these 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—a child needs to understand what is going on within his conscious self so that he can also cope with that which goes on in his unconscious. He can achieve this understanding, and with it the ability to cope, not through rational comprehension of the nature and content of his unconscious, but by becoming familiar with it through spinning out daydreams—ruminating, rearranging, and fantasizing about suitable story elements in response to unconscious pressures. By doing this, the child fits unconscious content into conscious fantasies, which then enable him to deal with that content. It is here that fairy tales have unequaled value, because they offer new dimensions to the child's imagination which would be impossible for him to discover as truly on his own. Even more important, the form and structure of fairy tales suggest images to the child by which he can structure his daydreams and with them give better direction to his life.

In child or adult, the unconscious is a powerful determinant of behavior. When the unconscious is repressed and its content denied entrance into awareness, then eventually the person's conscious mind will be partially overwhelmed by derivatives of these unconscious elements, or else he is forced to keep such rigid, compulsive control over them that his personality may become severely crippled. But when unconscious material *is* to some degree permitted to come to awareness and worked through in imagination, its potential for causing harm—to ourselves or others—is much reduced; some of its forces can then be made to serve positive purposes. However, the prevalent parental belief is that a child must be diverted from what troubles him most: his formless, nameless anxieties, and his chaotic, angry, and even violent fantasies. Many parents believe that only conscious reality or pleasant and wish-fulfilling images should be presented to the child—that he should be exposed only to the sunny side of things. But such one-sided fare nourishes the mind only in a one-sided way, and real life is not all sunny.

There is a widespread refusal to let children know that the source of much that goes wrong in life is due to our very own natures—the propensity of all men for acting aggressively, asocially, selfishly, out of anger and anxiety. Instead, we want our children to believe that, inherently, all men are good. But children know that *they* are not always good; and often, even when they are, they would prefer not to be. This contradicts what they are told by their parents, and therefore makes the child a monster in his own eyes.

The dominant culture wishes to pretend, particularly where children are concerned, that the dark side of man does not exist, and professes a belief in an optimistic meliorism. 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 imprint 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 indirection: 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.* Another 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 exactly like "Hansel and Gretel": "Hard by a great forest dwelt a woodcutter with his wife." As in "Hansel and Gretel," the couple are so poor that they can no longer feed themselves and their three-year-old daughter. Moved by their distress, the Virgin Mary appears to them and offers to take care of the little girl, whom she takes with her to heaven. The girl lives a wonderful life there until she reaches the age of fourteen. At this time, much as in the very different tale of "Bluebeard," the Virgin entrusts the girl with the keys to thirteen doors, twelve of which she may open, but not the thirteenth. The girl cannot resist this temptation; she lies about it, and in consequence has to return to earth, mute. She undergoes severe ordeals and is about to be burned at the stake. At this moment, as she desires only to confess her misdeed, she regains her voice to do so, and is granted by the Virgin "happiness for her whole life." The lesson of the story is: a voice used to tell lies leads us only to perdition; better we should be deprived of it, as is the heroine of the story. But a voice used to repent, to admit our failures and state the truth, redeems us.

Quite a few of the Brothers Grimm's other stories contain or begin with religious allusions. "The Old Man Made Young Again" starts: "At the time when our Lord still walked the earth, he and St. Peter stopped one evening at a smith's house...." In another story, "The Poor Man and the Rich Man," God, like any other fairy-tale hero, is tired from walking. That story begins: "In olden times, when the Lord himself still used to walk about on this earth amongst men, it once happened that he was tired and overtaken by the darkness before he could reach an inn. Now there stood on the road before him two houses facing each other...." But important and fascinating as these religious aspects of fairy stories are, they remain beyond the scope and purpose of this book, and so are left unexamined here.

Even given this book's relatively restricted purpose, that of suggesting why fairy tales are so meaningful to children in helping them cope with the psychological problems of growing up and integrating their personalities, some serious but necessary limitations have had to be accepted.

The first of these lies in the fact that today only a small number of fairy tales are widely known. Most of the points made in this book could have been illustrated more vividly if some of the more obscure fairy stories could have been referred to. But since these tales, though once familiar, are presently unknown, it would have been necessary to reprint them here, making for a book of unwieldy size. Therefore the

decision was made to concentrate on a few still-popular fairy stories, to show some of their underlying meanings, and how these 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 reassurance 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 ascendancy. 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 problem, 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 lifeline.

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 a certain story has 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 of 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 to 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.

*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 the beginning of a Christian existence. It is possible to view the seven brothers as representing that which had to disappear for Christianity to come into being. If so, they represent the pre-Christian, pagan world in which the seven planets stood for the sky gods of antiquity. The newborn girl is then the new religion, which can succeed only if the old creed does not interfere with its development. With Christianity, the brothers who represent paganism become relegated to darkness. But as ravens, they dwell in a mountain at the end of the world, and this suggests their continued existence in a subterranean, subconscious world. Their return to humanity occurs only because the sister sacrifices one of her fingers, and this conforms to the Christian idea that only those who are willing to sacrifice that part of their body which prevents them from reaching perfection, if the circumstance requires it, will be allowed to enter heaven. The new religion, Christianity, can liberate even those who remained at first arrested in paganism.

*The versions of the fairy tales discussed in this book are referred to in the Notes at the end of the book.

“CINDERELLA”

By all accounts, “Cinderella” is the best-known fairy tale, and probably also the best-liked.⁷³ It is quite an old story; when first written down in China during the ninth century A.D., it already had a history.⁷⁴ 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. 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 evildoer who is powerful, while pious Abel is forced to be his ash-brother (*Aschebrüdel*), 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.⁷⁶ 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 emotions aroused in the person subject to sibling rivalry are far out of proportion to what his real situation with his sisters and brothers would justify, seen objectively. While all children at times suffer greatly from sibling rivalry, parents seldom sacrifice one of their children to the others, nor do they condone the other children’s persecuting one of them. Difficult as objective judgments

are for the young child—nearly impossible when his emotions are aroused—even he in his more rational moments “knows” that he is not treated as badly as Cinderella. But the child often feels mistreated, despite all his “knowledge” to the contrary. That is why he believes in the inherent truth of “Cinderella,” and then he also comes to believe in her eventual deliverance and victory. From her triumph he gains the exaggerated hopes for his future which he needs to counteract the extreme misery he experiences when ravaged by sibling rivalry.

Despite the name “sibling rivalry,” this miserable passion has only incidentally to do with a child’s actual brothers and sisters. The real source of it is the child’s feelings about his parents. When a child’s older brother or sister is more competent than he, this arouses only temporary feelings of jealousy. Another child being given special attention becomes an insult only if the child fears that, in contrast, he is thought little of by his parents, or feels rejected by them. It is because of such an anxiety that one or all of a child’s sisters or brothers may become a thorn in his flesh. Fearing that in comparison to them he cannot win his parents’ love and esteem is what inflames sibling rivalry. This is indicated in stories by the fact that it matters little whether the siblings actually possess greater competence. The Biblical story of Joseph tells that it is jealousy of parental affection lavished on him which accounts for the destructive behavior of his brothers. Unlike Cinderella’s, Joseph’s parent does not participate in degrading him, and, on the contrary, prefers him to his other children. But Joseph, like Cinderella, is turned into a slave, and, like her, he miraculously escapes and ends by surpassing his siblings.

Telling a child who is devastated by sibling rivalry that he will grow up to do as well as his brothers and sisters offers little relief from his present feelings of dejection. Much as he would like to trust our assurances, most of the time he cannot. A child can see things only with subjective eyes, and comparing himself on this basis to his siblings, he has no confidence that he, on his own, will someday be able to fare as well as they. If he could believe more in himself, he would not feel destroyed by his siblings no matter what they might do to him, since then he could trust that time would bring about a desired reversal of fortune. But since the child cannot, on his own, look forward with confidence to some future day when things will turn out all right for him, he can gain relief only through fantasies of glory—a domination over his siblings—which he hopes will become reality through some fortunate event.

Whatever our position within the family, at certain times in our lives we are beset by sibling rivalry in some form or other. Even an only child feels that other children have some great advantages over him, and this makes him intensely jealous. Further, he may suffer from the anxious thought that if he did have a sibling, his parents would prefer this other child to him. “Cinderella” is a fairy tale which makes nearly as strong an appeal to boys as to girls, since children of both sexes suffer equally from sibling rivalry, and have the same desire to be rescued from their lowly position and surpass those who seem superior to them.

On the surface, “Cinderella” is as deceptively simple as the story of Little Red Riding Hood, with which it shares greatest popularity. “Cinderella” tells about the agonies of sibling rivalry, of wishes coming true, of the humble being elevated, of true merit being recognized even when hidden under rags, of virtue rewarded and evil punished—a straightforward story. But under this overt content is concealed a welter of complex and largely unconscious material, which details of the story allude to just enough to set our unconscious associations going. This makes a contrast between surface simplicity and underlying complexity which arouses deep interest in the story and explains its appeal to the millions over centuries. To begin gaining an understanding of these hidden meanings, we have to penetrate behind the obvious sources of sibling rivalry discussed so far.

As mentioned before, if the child could only believe that it is the infirmities of his age which account for his lowly position, he would not have to suffer so wretchedly from sibling rivalry, because he could trust the future to right matters. When he thinks that his degradation is deserved, he feels his plight is utterly hopeless. Djuna Barnes’s perceptive statement about fairy tales—that the child knows something about

them which he cannot tell (such as that he likes the idea of Little Red Riding Hood and the wolf being in bed together)—could be extended by dividing fairy tales into two groups: one group where the child responds only unconsciously to the inherent truth of the story and thus cannot tell about it; and another large number of tales where the child preconsciously or even consciously knows what the “truth” of the story consists of and thus could tell about it, but does not want to let on that he knows.⁷⁷ Some aspects of “Cinderella” fall into the latter category. Many children believe that Cinderella probably deserves her fate at the beginning of the story, as they feel they would, too; but they don’t want anyone to know it. Despite this, she is worthy at the end to be exalted, as the child hopes he will be too, irrespective of his earlier shortcomings.

Every child believes at some period of his life—and this is not only at rare moments—that because of his secret wishes, if not also his clandestine actions, he deserves to be degraded, banned from the presence of others, relegated to a netherworld of smut. He fears this may be so, irrespective of how fortunate his situation may be in reality. He hates and fears those others—such as his siblings—whom he believes to be entirely free of similar evilness, and he fears that they or his parents will discover what he is really like, and then demean him as Cinderella was by her family. Because he wants others—most of all, his parents—to believe in his innocence, he is delighted that “everybody” believes in Cinderella’s. This is one of the great attractions of this fairy tale. Since people give credence to Cinderella’s goodness, they will also believe in his, so the child hopes. And “Cinderella” nourishes this hope, which is one reason it is such a delightful story.

Another aspect which holds large appeal for the child is the vileness of the stepmother and stepsisters. Whatever the shortcomings of a child may be in his own eyes, these pale into insignificance when compared to the stepsisters’ and stepmother’s falsehood and nastiness. Further, what these stepsisters do to Cinderella justifies whatever nasty thoughts one may have about one’s siblings: they are so vile that anything one may wish would happen to them is more than justified. Compared to their behavior, Cinderella is indeed innocent. So the child, on hearing her story, feels he need not feel guilty about his angry thoughts.

On a very different level—and reality considerations coexist easily with fantastic exaggerations in the child’s mind—as badly as one’s parents or siblings seem to treat one, and much as one thinks one suffers because of it, all this is nothing compared to Cinderella’s fate. Her story reminds the child at the same time how lucky he is, and how much worse things could be. (Any anxiety about the latter possibility is relieved, as always in fairy tales, by the happy ending.)

The behavior of a five-and-a-half-year-old girl, as reported by her father, may illustrate how easily a child may feel that she is a “Cinderella.” This little girl had a younger sister of whom she was very jealous. The girl was very fond of “Cinderella,” since the story offered her material with which to act out her feelings, and because without the story’s imagery she would have been hard pressed to comprehend and express them. This little girl had used to dress very neatly and liked pretty clothes, but she became unkempt and dirty. One day when she was asked to fetch some salt, she said as she was doing so, “Why do you treat me like Cinderella?”

Almost speechless, her mother asked her, “Why do you think I treat you like Cinderella?”

“Because you make me do all the hardest work in the house!” was the little girl’s answer. Having thus drawn her parents into her fantasies, she acted them out more openly, pretending to sweep up all the dirt, etc. She went even further, playing that she prepared her little sister for the ball. But she went the “Cinderella” story one better, based on her unconscious understanding of the contradictory emotions fused into the “Cinderella” role, because at another moment she told her mother and sister, “You shouldn’t be jealous of me just because I am the most beautiful in the family.”⁷⁸

This shows that behind the surface humility of Cinderella lies the conviction of her superiority to mother and sisters, as if she would think: “You can make me do all the dirty work, and I pretend that I am dirty, but within me I know that you treat me this way because you are jealous of me because I am so much better than you.” This conviction is supported by the story’s ending, which assures every “Cinderella” that eventually she will be discovered by her prince.

Why does the child believe deep within himself that Cinderella deserves her dejected state? This question takes us back to the child’s state of mind at the end of the oedipal period. Before he is caught in oedipal entanglements, the child is convinced that he is lovable, and loved, if all is well within his family relationships. Psychoanalysis describes this stage of complete satisfaction with oneself as “primary narcissism.” During this period the child feels certain that he is the center of the universe, so there is no reason to be jealous of anybody.

The oedipal disappointments which come at the end of this developmental stage cast deep shadows of doubt on the child’s sense of his worthiness. He feels that if he were really as deserving of love as he had thought, then his parents would never be critical of him or disappoint him. The only explanation for parental criticism the child can think of is that there must be some serious flaw in him which accounts for what he experiences as rejection. If his desires remain unsatisfied and his parents disappoint him, there must be something wrong with him or his desires, or both. He cannot yet accept that reasons other than those residing within him could have an impact on his fate. In his oedipal jealousy, wanting to get rid of the parent of the same sex had seemed the most natural thing in the world, but now the child realizes that he cannot have his own way, and that maybe this is so because the desire was wrong. He is no longer so sure that he is preferred to his siblings, and he begins to suspect that this may be due to the fact that *they* are free of any bad thoughts or wrongdoing such as his.

All this happens as the child is gradually subjected to ever more critical attitudes as he is being socialized. He is asked to behave in ways which run counter to his natural desires, and he resents this. Still he must obey, which makes him very angry. This anger is directed against those who make demands, most likely his parents; and this is another reason to wish to get rid of them, and still another reason to feel guilty about such wishes. This is why the child also feels that he deserves to be chastised for his feelings, a punishment he believes he can escape only if nobody learns what he is thinking when he is angry. The feeling of being unworthy to be loved by his parents at a time when his desire for their love is very strong leads to the fear of rejection, even when in reality there is none. This rejection fear compounds the anxiety that others are preferred and also maybe preferable—the root of sibling rivalry.

Some of the child’s pervasive feelings of worthlessness have their origin in his experiences during and around toilet training and all other aspects of his education to become clean, neat, and orderly. Much has been said about how children are made to feel dirty and bad because they are not as clean as their parents want or require them to be. As clean as a child may learn to be, he knows that he would much prefer to give free rein to his tendency to be messy, disorderly, and dirty.

At the end of the oedipal period, guilt about desires to be dirty and disorderly becomes compounded by oedipal guilt, because of the child’s desire to replace the parent of the same sex in the love of the other parent. The wish to be the love, if not also the sexual partner, of the parent of the other sex, which at the beginning of the oedipal development seemed natural and “innocent,” at the end of the period is repressed as bad. But while this wish as such is repressed, guilt about it and about sexual feelings in general is not, and this makes the child feel dirty and worthless.

Here again, lack of objective knowledge leads the child to think that he is the only bad one in all these respects—the only child who has such desires. It makes every child identify with Cinderella, who is relegated to sit among the cinders. Since the child has such “dirty” wishes, that is where he also belongs, and where he would end up if his parents knew of his desires. This is why every child needs to believe

that even if he were thus degraded, eventually he would be rescued from such degradation and experience the most wonderful exaltation—as Cinderella does.

For the child to deal with his feelings of dejection and worthlessness aroused during this time, he desperately needs to gain some grasp on what these feelings of guilt and anxiety are all about. Further, he needs assurance on a conscious and an unconscious level that he will be able to extricate himself from these predicaments. One of the greatest merits of “Cinderella” is that, irrespective of the magic help Cinderella receives, the child understands that essentially it is through her own efforts, and because of the person she is, that Cinderella is able to transcend magnificently her degraded state, despite what appear as insurmountable obstacles. It gives the child confidence that the same will be true for him, because the story relates so well to what has caused both his conscious and his unconscious guilt.

Overtly “Cinderella” tells about sibling rivalry in its most extreme form: the jealousy and enmity of the stepsisters, and Cinderella’s sufferings because of it. The many other psychological issues touched upon in the story are so covertly alluded to that the child does not become consciously aware of them. In his unconscious, however, the child responds to these significant details which refer to matters and experiences from which he consciously has separated himself, but which nevertheless continue to create vast problems for him.

In the Western world the history of “Cinderella” in print begins with Basile’s story “The Cat Cinderella.”⁷⁹ In it, we are told of a widowed prince who loves his daughter so much “that he saw with no other eyes but hers.” This prince marries an evil woman who hates his daughter—we may assume out of jealousy—and “threw sour looks on her, enough to make her jump with fright.” The girl complains about this to her beloved governess, saying that she wishes the prince had married the governess instead. The governess, tempted by this possibility, tells the girl, named Zezolla, to ask her stepmother to fetch some clothes out of a big chest so that as the woman is bending into the chest, Zezolla can slam the lid on her head and thus break her neck. Zezolla follows this advice and kills her stepmother.⁸⁰ Then she persuades her father to marry the governess.

Within days after the marriage, the new wife begins to promote her own six daughters, whom she has kept hidden up till now. She turns the father’s heart against Zezolla, who is “brought to such a pass that she fell from the salon to the kitchen, from the canopy to the grate, from splendid silks and gold to dish-clouts, from scepter to spits; not only did she change her state, but also her name, and was no longer Zezolla, but ‘Cat Cinderella.’ ”

One day when the prince is about to go on a trip, he asks all his daughters what they want him to bring back to them. The stepdaughters ask for various expensive things; Zezolla requests only that he recommend her to the dove of the fairies and beg them to send her something. The fairies send Zezolla a date tree with materials for planting and cultivating it. Soon after Cat Cinderella has planted and tended the tree with great care, it grows to the size of a woman. A fairy comes out of it and asks Cat Cinderella what she wants. All she wishes is to be able to leave the house without her stepsisters knowing.

On the day of a great feast, the stepsisters dress fancily and go to the feast. As soon as they have left, Cat Cinderella “ran to the plant and uttered the words the fairy had taught her, and at once she was decked out like a queen.” The country’s king, who happens to come to the feast, is bewitched by Cat Cinderella’s extraordinary loveliness. To find out who she is, he orders one of his servants to follow her, but she manages to elude him. The same events occur on the next feast day. During a third celebration, events again repeat themselves, but this time, while being pursued by a servant, Cat Cinderella lets slip from her foot “the richest and prettiest patten you could imagine.” (In Basile’s time Neapolitan ladies wore high-heeled overshoes, called pattens, when they went out.) To find the beautiful girl to whom the shoe belongs, the king orders all the females in the kingdom to come to a party. At its end, when the king orders all females to try on the lost patten, “the moment it came near Zezolla’s foot, it darted forward of

itself to shoe her.” So the king makes Zezolla his queen, and “the sisters, livid with envy, crept quietly home to their mother.”

The motif of a child killing a mother or stepmother is very rare.* Zezolla’s temporary degradation is so inadequate a punishment for murder that we have to look for some explanation, particularly since her debasement to being “Cat Cinderella” is not retaliation for this evil deed, or at least not directly so. Another unique feature of this story is the duplication of stepmothers. In “Cat Cinderella” we are told nothing about her true mother, who is mentioned in most “Cinderella” stories; and it is not a symbolic representation of the original mother who provides her mistreated daughter with the means for meeting her prince, but a fairy in the form of a date tree.

It is possible that in “Cat Cinderella,” real mother and first stepmother are one and the same person at different developmental periods; and her murder and replacement are an oedipal fantasy rather than a reality. If so, it makes good sense that Zezolla is not punished for crimes she only imagined. Her degradation in favor of her siblings may also be a fantasy of what might happen to her if she would act on her oedipal wishes. Once Zezolla has outgrown the oedipal age and is ready to have good relations with her mother once again, the mother returns in the form of the fairy in the date tree and enables her daughter to gain sexual success with the king, a non-oedipal object.

That Cinderella’s position is the consequence of an oedipal relation is suggested by many versions in this cycle of fairy tales. In stories which are diffused all over Europe, Africa, and Asia—in Europe, for example, in France, Italy, Austria, Greece, Ireland, Scotland, Poland, Russia, Scandinavia—Cinderella flees from a father who wants to marry her. In another group of widely distributed tales she is exiled by her father because she does not love him as much as he requires, although she loves him well enough. So there are many examples of the “Cinderella” theme in which her degradation—often without any (step)mother and (step)sisters being part of the story—is the consequence of oedipal entanglement of father and daughter.

M. R. Cox, who has made a comprehensive study of 345 “Cinderella” stories, divides them into three broad categories.⁸² The first group contains only the two features which are essential to all: an ill-treated heroine, and her recognition by means of a slipper. Cox’s second main group contains two more essential features: what Cox in her Victorian manner calls an “unnatural father”—that is, a father who wants to marry his daughter—and another feature which is a consequence of this—the heroine’s flight, which eventually makes her into a “Cinderella.” In Cox’s third large grouping, the two additional features of the second are replaced by what Cox calls a “King Lear Judgment”: a father’s extracting from his daughter a declaration of love which he deems insufficient, so that she is therefore banished, which forces her into the “Cinderella” position.

Basile’s is one of the very few “Cinderella” stories in which the heroine’s fate is clearly her own creation, the result of her plotting and misdeed. In practically all other versions, she is on the surface entirely innocent. She does nothing to arouse her father’s wish to marry her; she does not fail to love her father, although he banishes her because he thinks she does not love him enough. In the stories now best known, Cinderella does nothing that would warrant her debasement in favor of her stepsisters.

In most “Cinderella” stories, except Basile’s, Cinderella’s innocence is stressed; her virtue is perfect. Unfortunately, in human relations it is rare that one of the partners is innocence incarnate while the other is the sole guilty party. In a fairy tale this is of course possible; it is no greater miracle than those performed by fairy godmothers. But when we identify with a story’s heroine, we do so for our own reasons, and our conscious and unconscious associations enter into it. A girl’s thoughts about this story may be strongly influenced by what she wishes to believe about her father’s relation to her, and what she desires to dissemble about her feelings toward him.⁸³

The many stories in which innocent Cinderella is claimed by her father as his marital partner, a fate from which she can save herself only through flight, could be interpreted as conforming to and expressing universal childish fantasies in which a girl wishes her father would marry her and then, out of guilt because of these fantasies, denies doing anything to arouse this parental desire. But deep down a child who knows that she does want her father to prefer her to her mother feels she deserves to be punished for it—thus her flight or banishment, and degradation to a Cinderella existence.

The other stories in which Cinderella is expelled by her father because she does not love him enough may be viewed as a projection of a little girl's wish that her father should want her to love him beyond reason, as she wants to love him. Or the father's expulsion of Cinderella because she does not love him enough could equally well be regarded as giving body to paternal oedipal feelings for a daughter, in this way making an appeal to the unconscious and by now deeply repressed oedipal feelings of both father and child.

In Basile's story Cinderella is innocent in relation to her stepsisters and the governess turned stepmother, although she is guilty of murdering her first stepmother. Neither in Basile's story nor in the much more ancient Chinese tale is there any mention of Cinderella being mistreated by her siblings, nor of any debasement other than being forced by a (step)mother to perform menial tasks in tattered clothes. She is not deliberately excluded from attending the feast. Sibling rivalry, so dominant in the presently known versions of "Cinderella," hardly plays a role in these early stories. For example, when the sisters in Basile's story are envious of Cinderella becoming queen, this seems no more than a natural reaction at losing out to her.

Matters are quite different in the "Cinderella" stories known today, where the siblings actively participate in Cinderella's mistreatment and are appropriately punished. Even so, nothing untoward happens to the stepmother, although she is very much an accessory to what the stepsisters inflict on Cinderella. It is as if the story implies that abuse by the (step)mother was somehow deserved, but not that by the stepsisters. What Cinderella may have done or wished to do which could justify the (step)mother's mistreatment can only be surmised from stories such as Basile's, or those others where she arouses so much love in the father that he wants to marry her.

Given these early "Cinderella" stories in which sibling rivalry plays only an insignificant role while oedipal rejections are central—a daughter flees from her father because of his sexual desires for her; a father rejects his daughter because she does not love him sufficiently; a mother rejects her daughter because the husband loves her too much; and the rare case where a daughter wishes to replace her father's wife with a choice of her own—one might think that, originally, thwarted oedipal desires account for the heroine's degradation. But there is no clear historical sequence in regard to these fairy stories forming one cycle, if for no other reason that, in oral tradition, ancient versions exist side by side with more recent ones. The lateness of the period when fairy stories were finally collected and published makes any sequential ordering of them before this happened highly speculative.

But while there are great variations in less important details, all versions of this story are alike in regard to the essential features. For example, in all stories the heroine at first enjoyed love and high esteem, and her fall from this favored position to utter degradation occurs as suddenly as her return to a much more exalted position at the story's end. The denouement comes about by her being recognized by the slipper which fits only her foot. (Occasionally another object, such as a ring, takes the slipper's place.⁸⁴). The one crucial point of difference—in terms of which (as discussed) various groups of the stories are distinguished—lies in the *cause* of Cinderella's degradation.

In one group, the father plays a central role as Cinderella's antagonist. In the second group, the (step)mother *cum* stepsisters are the antagonists; in these stories, mother and daughters are so closely identified with each other that one gets the feeling that they are one unit split into different figures. In the

first group, too much love of a father for his daughter causes Cinderella's tragic condition. In the other, the hatred of a (step)mother and her daughters due to sibling competition accounts for it.

If we trust the clues provided by Basile's story, then we may say that inordinate love of a father for his daughter and hers for him came first, and her reduction to the Cinderella role by mother *cum* sisters is the consequence. This situation parallels the oedipal development of a girl. She first loves her mother—the original good mother, who later in the story reappears as fairy godmother. Later she turns from her mother to her father, loving him and wanting to be loved by him; at this point the mother—and all her siblings, real and imagined, most of all the female ones—become her competitors. At the end of the oedipal period the child feels cast out, all alone; then when all goes well in puberty, if not sooner, the girl finds her way back to the mother, now as a person not to be loved exclusively, but as one with whom to identify.

The hearth, the center of the home, is a symbol for the mother. To live so close to it that one dwells among the ashes may then symbolize an effort at holding on to, or returning to, the mother and what she represents. All little girls try to return to the mother from the disappointment inflicted on them by the father. This attempted return to Mother, however, no longer works—because she is no longer the all-giving mother of infancy, but a mother who makes demands of the child. Seen in this light, at the story's beginning Cinderella mourns not only the loss of the original mother, but grieves also at the loss of her dreams about the wonderful relation she was going to have with Father. Cinderella has to work through her deep oedipal disappointments to return to a successful life at the story's end, no longer a child, but a young maiden ready for marriage.

Thus, the two groups of "Cinderella" stories which differ so greatly on the surface, in regard to what causes her misfortune, are not at all contrary on a deeper level. They simply render separately some main aspects of the same phenomenon: the girl's oedipal desires and anxieties.

Things are considerably more complex in the "Cinderella" stories now popular, which may go a long way to explain why these superseded some of the older versions, such as Basile's. The oedipal desires for the father are repressed—except for the expectation that he will give her a magic present. The present her father brings Cinderella, such as the date tree in "Cat Cinderella," gives her the opportunity to meet her prince and gain his love, which leads to his replacing the father as the man she loves most in the world.

Cinderella's wish to eliminate Mother is completely repressed in the modern versions and replaced by a displacement and a projection: it is not Mother who overtly plays a crucial role in the girl's life, but a stepmother; Mother is displaced by a substitute. And it is not the girl who wants to debase Mother so that she will be able to play a much bigger role in her father's life, but, in a projection, it is the stepmother who wants to see the girl replaced. One more displacement further assures that the true desires remain hidden: it is her siblings who want to take the heroine's rightful place away from her.

In those versions, sibling rivalry takes the place of an oedipal involvement that has been repressed, as the center of the plot. In real life, positive and negative oedipal relations, and guilt about these relations often remain hidden behind sibling rivalry. However, as happens frequently with complex psychological phenomena which arouse great guilt, all that the person consciously experiences is anxiety due to the guilt, and not the guilt itself, or what caused it. Thus, "Cinderella" tells only about the misery of being degraded.

In the best fairy-tale tradition, the anxiety Cinderella's pitiful existence evokes in the hearer is soon relieved by the happy ending. By feeling deeply for Cinderella, the child (implicitly and without its coming to conscious awareness) deals in some fashion with oedipal anxiety and guilt, and also with the desires which underlie it. The child's hope of being able to disentangle herself from her oedipal predicament by finding a love object to whom she can give herself without guilt or anxiety is turned into

confidence, because the story assures that entering the lower depths of existence is but a necessary step toward becoming able to realize one's highest potentials.

It must be stressed that it would be impossible, upon hearing the story of Cinderella in one of its presently popular forms, to recognize consciously that her unhappy state is due to oedipal involvements on her part, and that by insisting on her unrivaled innocence the story is covering up her oedipal guilt. The well-known "Cinderella" stories consistently obscure what is oedipal, and offer no hints to cast doubt on Cinderella's innocence. On a conscious level, the evilness of stepmother and stepsisters is sufficient explanation for what happens to Cinderella. The modern plot centers on sibling rivalry; the stepmother's degrading Cinderella has no cause other than the wish to advance her own daughters; and the stepsisters' nastiness is due to their being jealous of Cinderella.

But "Cinderella" cannot fail to activate in us those emotions and unconscious ideas which, in our inner experience, are connected with our feelings of sibling rivalry. From his own experience with it, the child might well understand—without "knowing" anything about it—the welter of inner experiences connected with Cinderella. Recalling, if she is a girl, her repressed wishes to get rid of Mother and have Father all to herself, and now feeling guilty about such "dirty" desires, a girl may well "understand" why a mother would send her daughter out of sight to reside among the cinders, and prefer her other children. Where is the child who has not wished to be able to banish a parent at some time, and who does not feel that in retaliation he merits the same fate? And where is the child who has not wanted to wallow to his heart's desire in dirt or mud; and, being made to feel dirty by parental criticism in consequence, become convinced that he deserves nothing better than to be relegated to a dirty corner?

The purpose of elaborating on "Cinderella's" oedipal background was to show that the story offers the hearer a deeper understanding of that which is behind his own feelings of sibling rivalry. If the hearer permits his unconscious understanding to "swing" along with what his conscious mind is being told, he gains a much deeper understanding of what accounts for the complex emotions which his siblings arouse. Sibling rivalry, both in its overt expression and in its denial, is very much part of our lives well into maturity, as is its counterpart, our positive attachments to our siblings. But because the latter rarely lead to emotional difficulties, and the former does, greater understanding of what is psychologically involved in sibling rivalry could help us deal with this important and difficult problem in our lives.

Like "Little Red Cap," "Cinderella" is known today mainly in two different forms, one which derives from Perrault, the other from the Brothers Grimm—and the two versions are considerably at variance.⁸⁵

As with all of Perrault's stories, the trouble with his "Cinderella" is that he took fairy-tale material—either Basile's or some other "Cinderella" story known to him from oral tradition, or a combination of both sources—freed it of all content he considered vulgar, and refined its other features to make the product suitable to be told at court. Being an author of great skill and taste, he invented details and changed others to make the story conform to his aesthetic concepts. It was, for example, his invention that the fateful slipper was made of glass, which is in no other versions but those derived from his.

There is quite a controversy about this detail. Since in French the word *vair* (which means variegated fur) and *verre* (glass) are sometimes pronounced similarly, it was assumed that Perrault, on having heard the story, mistakenly substituted *verre* for *vair* and thus changed a fur slipper into one made of glass. Although this explanation is often repeated, there seems no doubt that the glass slipper was Perrault's deliberate invention. But because of it he had to drop an important feature of many earlier versions of "Cinderella," which tell how the stepsisters mutilated their feet to make them fit the slipper. The prince fell for this deception until he was made aware by the songs of birds that there was blood in the shoe. This detail would have been immediately obvious had the slipper been made of glass. For example, in "Rashin Coatie" (a Scottish version) the stepmother forces the slipper onto her daughter's foot by cutting off her heel and toes. On the way to church a bird sings:

*“Minched fit, and pinched fit
Beside the king she rides,
But braw fit, and bonny fit
In the kitchen neuk she hides.”⁸⁶*

The bird’s song brings to the prince’s attention that the stepsister is not the right bride. But such coarse mutilation would not have fitted in with the polite way in which Perrault wished to retell his story.

Perrault’s story and those directly based on it depict the character of the heroine quite differently from all other versions. Perrault’s Cinderella is sugar-sweet and insipidly good, and she completely lacks initiative (which probably accounts for Disney’s choosing Perrault’s version of “Cinderella” as the basis for his rendering of the story). Most other Cinderellas are much more of a person. To mention only some of the differences, in Perrault it is Cinderella’s choice to sleep among the cinders: “When she had done her work, she went to the corner of the chimney and sat down among the cinders,” which led to her name. There is no such self-debasement in the Brothers Grimm’s story; as they tell it, Cinderella *had* to bed down among the ashes.

When it comes to dressing the stepsisters for the ball, Perrault’s Cinderella all on her own “advised them the best way in the world, and offered herself to do their hair,” while in the Brothers Grimm’s version the stepsisters order her to comb their hair and brush their shoes; she obeys but weeps while doing so. As for getting to the ball, Perrault’s Cinderella takes no action; it is her fairy godmother who tells her that she wishes to go. In the Brothers Grimm’s story Cinderella asks her stepmother to let her go to the ball, persists in her request although turned down, and performs the impossible tasks demanded of her so that she can go. At the ball’s end she leaves of her own accord and hides from the pursuing prince. Perrault’s Cinderella does not depart because she considers it right to do so, but simply obeys a command of her fairy godmother not to remain one moment after midnight because otherwise the coach will again become a pumpkin, etc.

When it comes to the trying on of the slipper, in Perrault it is not the prince who searches for its owner, but a gentleman sent to look for the girl it fits. Before Cinderella is to meet the prince, her godmother appears and equips her with beautiful clothes. Thus, an important detail in the Brothers Grimm’s and most other versions gets lost—namely, that the prince remains undismayed by Cinderella’s appearance in rags because he recognizes her inherent qualities, apart from her outer appearance. Thus, the contrast between the materialistic stepsisters, who rely on externals, and Cinderella, who cares little about them, is reduced.

In Perrault’s version it does not make all that much difference whether one is vile or virtuous. In his story the stepsisters are considerably more abusive of Cinderella than in that of the Brothers Grimm; nevertheless, at the end Cinderella embraces those who have vilified her and tells them that she loves them with all her heart and desires them always to love her. From the story, however, it is incomprehensible why she would care for their love, or how they could love her after all that has happened. Even after her marriage to the prince, Perrault’s Cinderella “gave her two sisters lodging in the palace, and married them the same day to two great lords of the court.”

In the Brothers Grimm’s version the ending is quite different, as it is in all other renderings of the tale. First, the sisters mutilate their feet to make the slipper fit. Second, they come on their own to Cinderella’s wedding to ingratiate themselves and have a share in her good fortune. But as they walk to the church, the pigeons—probably the same birds which had helped Cinderella earlier to meet the impossible tasks set her—pick out one eye from each, and as they return from church, the other. The story ends: “And thus for their wickedness and falsehood they were punished with blindness for the rest of their days.”

Of the many other differences in these two versions, only two more will be mentioned. In Perrault's tale the father plays no role to speak of. All we learn about him is that he married a second time and that Cinderella "did not dare to complain to her father because he would only have scolded her, because he was entirely run by his wife." Also, we hear nothing about the fairy godmother until she suddenly appears from nowhere to provide Cinderella with her coach, horses, and dress.

Since "Cinderella" is the most popular of all fairy tales and is distributed worldwide, it may be appropriate to consider the important motifs woven into the story which, in their combination, make for its great conscious and unconscious appeal and its deep significance. Stith Thompson, who has made the most complete analysis of folk-tale motifs, enumerates those appearing in the Brothers Grimm's "Cinderella" as follows: an ill-treated heroine; her having to live by the hearth; the gift she asks of her father; the hazel branch she plants on her mother's grave; the tasks demanded of the heroine; the animals which help her perform them; the mother, transformed into the tree Cinderella grew on her grave, who provides her with beautiful clothes; the meeting at the ball; and Cinderella's threefold flight from it; her hiding first in a pigeon house and second in a pear tree, which are cut down by her father; the pitch trap and the lost shoe; the shoe test; the sisters' mutilation of their feet and acceptance as (false) brides; the animals which reveal the deception; the happy marriage; the nemesis wreaked on the villains.⁸⁷ My discussion of these story elements also includes some remarks on the better-known details of Perrault's "Cinderella" which are not part of the Brothers Grimm's tale.

Cinderella's mistreatment as a consequence of sibling rivalry, the story's main motif in its modern form, has already been dealt with. This is what makes the most immediate impact on the hearer and arouses his empathy. It leads him to identify with the heroine, and sets the stage for all that follows.

Cinderella's living among the ashes—from which she derives her name—is a detail of great complexity.* On the surface, it signifies abuse, and degradation from the fortunate position she enjoyed before the beginning of the story. But it is not without reason that Perrault has her choose to dwell among the ashes. We are so accustomed to thinking of living as a lowly servant among the ashes of the hearth as an extremely degraded situation that we have lost any recognition that, in a different view, it may be experienced as a very desirable, even exalted position. In ancient times, to be the guardian of the hearth—the duty of the Vestal Virgins—was one of the most prestigious ranks, if not the most exalted, available to a female. To be a Vestal Virgin was to be much envied in ancient Rome. A girl was selected for this honor when she was between six and ten years old—roughly the age of Cinderella as we imagine her during her years of servitude. In the Brothers Grimm's story Cinderella plants a twig and cultivates it with her tears and prayers. Only after it has grown into a tree does it provide her with what she needs to go to the ball—thus, several years must have passed between the planting and the ball. Six to ten years old is also the age of children on whom this story makes the deepest impression, and it often stays with them and sustains them for the rest of their lives.

Speaking of Cinderella's years of servitude: only at later times did it become customary for Vestal Virgins to serve for thirty years before they gave up office and could marry. Originally they remained priestesses for only five years: that is, until they reached marriageable age. This is about the amount of time one imagines Cinderella's sufferings to last. To be a Vestal Virgin meant both to be a guardian of the hearth and to be absolutely pure. After they had performed well in the role, these women made prestigious marriages, as does Cinderella. Thus, innocence, purity, and being guardian of the hearth go together in ancient connotations.* It is possible that with the rejection of paganism, what had been a highly desirable role became devalued in the Christian era to be the meanest. The Vestal Virgins served the sacred hearth and Hera, the mother goddess. With the change to a father god, the old maternal deities were degraded and devalued, as was a place close to the hearth. In this sense, Cinderella might also be viewed as the degraded mother goddess who at the end of the story is reborn out of the ashes, like the mythical bird phoenix. But these are connections of a historical nature which the average hearer of "Cinderella" will not readily establish in his mind.

There are other, equally positive associations to living by the hearth which are available to every child. Children love to spend time in the kitchen, watching and participating in the preparation of food. Before central heating, a seat close to the hearth was the warmest and often the coziest place in the house. The hearth evokes in many children happy memories of the time they spent there with their mothers.

Children also like to get themselves good and dirty; to be able to do so is a symbol of instinctual freedom to them. Thus, being a person who stirs around in the ashes, the original meaning of the name Aschenbrödel, has also very positive connotations for the child. Making oneself "good and dirty" is both pleasurable and guilt-producing today, as it was in times past.

Finally, Cinderella mourns her dead mother. "Ashes to ashes" is not the only saying which establishes close connection between the dead and ashes. To cover oneself with ashes is a symbol of mourning; living in dirty rags is a symptom of depression. Thus, dwelling among the ashes may symbolize both lovely times with Mother in proximity to the hearth, and also our state of deep mourning for this intimate closeness to Mother which we lost as we grew up, symbolized by the "death" of Mother. Because of this combination of images, the hearth evokes strong feelings of empathy, reminding us all of the paradise in which we once dwelt, and how radically our lives changed when we were forced to give up the simple and happy existence of the very young child, to cope with all the ambivalences of adolescence and adulthood.

As long as the child is little, his parents protect him against the ambivalences of his siblings and the demands of the world. In retrospect this seems to have been a paradisaical time. Then, suddenly, these older siblings seem to take advantage of the now less-protected child; they make demands; they and Mother become critical of what the child does. The references to his disorderliness, if not dirty habits, make him feel rejected and dirty; and the siblings seem to live in splendor. But their good behavior, the child believes, is a sham, a pretense, and a falsehood. And this is the image of the stepsisters in "Cinderella." The young child lives in extremes: at one moment he feels himself vile and dirty, full of hate; in the next he is all innocence, and the others are evil creatures.

Whatever the external conditions, during these years of sibling rivalry the child experiences an inner period of suffering, privation, even want; and he experiences misunderstandings, even malice. Cinderella's years among the ashes tell the child that nobody can escape this. There are times when it seems that only hostile forces exist, that no helpful ones are about. If the child being told the story of Cinderella did not come to feel that she had to endure a considerable stretch of such bad times, her relief would be incomplete when finally the helpful forces overcame the hostile ones. The child's misery at moments is so deep that it seems to last a very long time. Therefore no fleeting period in Cinderella's life would seem comparable to this. Cinderella must suffer as much and as long as the child believes he does, for her delivery to carry conviction and give him the certitude that the same thing will happen in his life.

After we have felt compassion for Cinderella's dejected state, the first positive development in her life occurs. "It once happened that the father wanted to go to a fair, so he asked the two stepdaughters what he should bring them. 'Beautiful clothes,' said one. 'Pearls and gems,' said the other. 'What about you, Aschenputtel,' he said, 'what do you want?' 'Father, the first twig that pushes against your hat on your return trip, break it off for me.' " He acts accordingly; a hazel branch not only pushes against his hat, but knocks it off. This branch he brings home to Aschenputtel. "She thanked him, went to her mother's grave and planted the branch on it; she wept so much that her tears fell on it and watered it. It grew and became a beautiful tree. There she went three times a day and wept and prayed; and each time a white bird lighted on the tree, and when she expressed a wish, the bird threw down what she had wished for."

Cinderella's asking her father for the twig she planned to plant on her mother's grave, and his meeting her desire, is a first tentative re-establishment of a positive relation between the two. From the story we assume that Cinderella must have been very disappointed in her father, if not also angry that he married

such a shrew. But to the young child, his parents are all-powerful. If Cinderella is to become master of her own fate, her parents' authority must be diminished. This diminution and transfer of power could be symbolized by the branch knocking the father's hat off his head, and also the fact that the same branch grows into a tree that has magic powers for Cinderella. Therefore, that which diminished the father (the branch of the hazel tree) is used by Cinderella to increase the power and prestige of the archaic (dead) mother. Since her father gives Cinderella the twig which enhances the memory of the mother, it seems to be a sign that he approves of her returning from her heavy involvement with him to the original unambivalent relation to the mother. This diminution of the father's emotional importance in Cinderella's life prepares the way for her transferring her childish love for him eventually into a mature love for the prince.

The tree which Cinderella plants on her mother's grave and waters with her tears is one of the most poetically moving and psychologically significant features of the story. It symbolizes that the memory of the idealized mother of infancy, when kept alive as an important part of one's internal experience, can and does support us even in the worst adversity.

This is told even more clearly in other versions of the story where the figure into which the good mother becomes transformed is not a tree but a helpful animal. For example, in the earliest recorded Chinese rendering of the "Cinderella" motif, the heroine has a tame fish which grows from two inches to ten feet under her devoted care. The evil stepmother discovers the importance of the fish, and cunningly kills and eats it. The heroine is desolate until a wise man tells her where the fish's bones are buried and advises her to collect and keep them in her room. He tells her that if she prays to these bones, she will obtain whatever she wishes. In many European and Eastern variations it is a calf, cow, goat, or some other animal into which the dead mother is transformed to become the heroine's magic helper.

The Scottish tale of "Rashin Coatie" is older than either Basile's or Perrault's "Cinderella," since it is mentioned as early as 1540.⁸⁹ A mother, before her death, bequeaths her daughter, Rashin Coatie, a little red calf, which gives her whatever she asks for. The stepmother finds out about this and orders the calf butchered. Rashin Coatie is desperate, but the dead calf tells her to pick up its bones and bury them under a gray stone. She does and henceforth receives what she desires by going to the stone and telling the calf. At Yuletide, when everybody puts on their best clothes to go to the church, Rashin Coatie is told by her stepmother that she is too dirty to join them in church. The dead calf provides Rashin Coatie with beautiful clothes; in church a prince falls in love with her; on their third meeting she loses a slipper, etc.

In many other "Cinderella" stories the helpful animal also nourishes the heroine. For example, in an Egyptian tale a stepmother and step-siblings mistreat two children, who beg, "O cow, be kind to us, as our mother was kind to us." The cow gives them good food. The stepmother finds out and has the cow butchered. The children burn the cow's bones and bury the ashes in a clay pot, from which a tree grows and bears fruits for the children, and this provides happiness for them.⁹⁰ So there are stories of the "Cinderella" type in which the animal and the tree representing the mother are combined, showing how one can stand for the other. These tales also illustrate the symbolic replacement of the original mother by an animal that gives us milk—the cow or, in Mediterranean countries, the goat. This reflects the emotional and psychological connection of early feeding experiences which provide security in later life.

Erikson speaks of "a sense of *basic trust*, which," he says, "is an attitude toward oneself and the world derived from the experience of the first year of life."⁹¹ Basic trust is instilled in the child by the good mothering he experiences during the earliest period of his life. If all goes well then, the child will have confidence in himself and in the world. The helpful animal or the magic tree is an image, embodiment, external representation of this basic trust. It is the heritage which a good mother confers on her child which will stay with him, and preserve and sustain him in direst distress.

The stories where the stepmother kills the helpful animal but does not succeed in depriving Cinderella of what gives her inner strength indicate that for our managing or coping with life, what exists in reality is less important than what goes on in our mind. What makes life bearable even in the worst circumstances is the image of the good mother which we have internalized, so that the disappearance of the external symbol does not matter.⁹²

One of the main overt messages of the various “Cinderella” stories is that we are mistaken if we think we must hold on to something in the external world to succeed in life. All efforts of the stepsisters to gain their goal through externals are in vain—their carefully selected and prepared clothes, the fraud through which they try to make their feet fit the shoe. Only being true to oneself, as Cinderella is, succeeds in the end. The same idea is conveyed by the mother’s or the helpful animal’s presence not being required. This is psychologically correct, because for one’s inner security and feeling of self-worth, no externals are necessary once one has developed basic trust—nor can externals compensate for not having attained basic trust in infancy. Those so unfortunate as to have lost out on basic trust at the beginning of life can achieve it, if at all, only through changes in the inner structure of their mind and personality, never through things that look good.

The image conveyed by the tree growing from a twig or the calf’s bones or ashes is that of something different developing out of the original mother, or the experience of her. The image of the tree is particularly pertinent because growth is involved, whether it is Cat Cinderella’s date tree or Cinderella’s hazel branch. This indicates that simply to retain the internalized image of the mother of a past period is not enough. As the child grows up, this internalized mother must undergo changes, too, as he does. This is a process of dematerialization, similar to that in which the child sublimates the real good mother into an inner experience of basic trust.

In the Brothers Grimm’s “Cinderella,” all of this is refined even more. Cinderella’s inner processes begin with her desperate mourning for her mother, as symbolized by her existence among the ashes. If she remained stuck there, no internal development would occur. Mourning as a temporary transition to continuing life without the loved person is necessary; but for survival it must eventually be turned into something positive: the erection of an internal representation of what has been lost in reality. Such an inner object will always remain inviolate within us, whatever happens in reality. Cinderella’s weeping over the planted twig shows that the memory of her dead mother is kept alive; but as the tree grows, so does the internalized mother grow inside Cinderella.

Cinderella’s prayers, also said over the tree, bespeak the hopes she cultivates. Prayers ask for something that we trust will happen: basic trust reasserts itself after the shock of adversity has worn off; this trust restores in us the hope that eventually things will again go well for us, as they have in our past. The little white bird which comes in answer to Cinderella’s prayers is the messenger of Ecclesiastes: “A bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which has wings shall tell the matter.” The white bird is easily recognized as the mother’s spirit conveyed to her child through the good mothering she gives him; it is the spirit which originally became implanted in the child as basic trust. As such, it becomes the child’s own spirit, which sustains him in all hardships, giving him hope for the future, and the strength to create a good life for himself.

Whether or not we recognize consciously the full significance of that which is symbolically expressed through the image of Cinderella’s asking for the twig, planting it, cultivating it with her tears and prayers, and finally through the little white bird alighting on it whenever Cinderella needs it, this feature of “Cinderella” touches us all, and we respond, at least preconsciously, to the meaning. It is a beautiful and effective image, even more meaningful and instructive to the child who is just beginning to internalize what his parents mean to him. It is as significant to boys as it is to girls because the internalized mother—or basic trust—is a crucially important mental phenomenon, whatever a person’s sex. By eliminating the

tree and replacing it with a fairy godmother who appears suddenly and unexpectedly out of nowhere, Perrault has robbed the story of some of its deepest meaning.

The Brothers Grimm's "Cinderella" conveys ever so subtly to the child that, miserable as he may feel at the moment—because of sibling rivalry or any other reason—by sublimating his misery and sorrow, as Cinderella does by planting and cultivating the tree with her emotions, the child on his very own can arrange things so that his life in the world will also become a good one.

In the Brothers Grimm's "Cinderella," right after we have been told about the tree and the little white bird that fulfills Cinderella's wishes, we learn that the king has ordered a three-day festival so that his son may select a bride. Cinderella begs to be permitted to go. Despite denials, she persists in her entreaties. Finally the stepmother tells her that she has emptied a dish of lentils into the ashes; if Cinderella picks them out within two hours, she may go to the ball.

This is one of the seemingly impossible tasks which fairy-tale heroes have to perform. In Eastern versions of "Cinderella," she has to do some spinning; in some Western stories, sift grain.⁹³ On the surface, this is another example of her being abused. But when this demand is made of Cinderella—after the radical change in her fortunes, since she has gained a magic helper in the white bird which fulfills her wishes, and just before she is to go to the ball—this suggests that hard and difficult tasks must be performed well before Cinderella is worthy of a happy ending. Thanks to the birds she calls in as helpers, Cinderella is able to finish the sorting task, only to have the stepmother repeat her demand with doubly increased difficulties: the second time she is required to sort two dishes of lentils spilled into the ashes and to do so in only one hour. Again with the aid of the birds Cinderella succeeds, but the stepmother still will not allow her to go to the ball, despite her two promises to do so.

The task demanded of Cinderella seems senseless: why drop lentils into the ashes only to have them picked out again? The stepmother is convinced that this is impossible, degrading, meaningless. But Cinderella knows that something good can be gained from whatever one does if one is able to endow it with meaning, even from stirring around in the ashes. This detail of the story encourages the child in his conviction that to dwell in lowly places—to play in and with dirt—can be of great value, if one knows how to extract it. Cinderella calls on the birds to help her, telling them to pick out the good lentils and put them in the pot, but to do away with the bad ones by eating them.

The stepmother's falseness in twice reneging on her promises is thus opposed to Cinderella's recognition that what is needed is a sorting out of good from evil. After Cinderella has spontaneously turned the task into a moral problem of good versus bad, and eliminated the bad, she proceeds to her mother's grave and asks the tree to "scatter gold and silver" over her. The bird throws down a gold-and-silver dress and, the first and second times, slippers decorated with silk and silver. The last time the slippers are made of gold.

In Perrault's tale, too, Cinderella has to accomplish a task before she can go to the ball. After the fairy godmother has told Cinderella that she is to go, she orders Cinderella to bring her a pumpkin from the garden. Although Cinderella does not understand the meaning of this, she does as she is told. It is the godmother, and not Cinderella, who scoops out the pumpkin and turns it into a coach. Then the godmother tells Cinderella to open a mousetrap, and she changes the six mice found there into horses. One rat is similarly transformed into a coachman. Finally Cinderella is to fetch six lizards, which become footmen. Her rags are made into beautiful clothes, and she is given glass slippers. So equipped, Cinderella leaves for the ball, but not before she is ordered to return before midnight because at that moment all will return to its original form.

The glass slippers, the pumpkin made into a coach—these are all Perrault's invention: there is no trace of them in any other version but his and those dependent on his. Marc Soriano sees in these details Perrault's mockery of the hearer who takes the story seriously, but also the irony with which he treats his subject: if

Cinderella can be changed into the most beautiful princess, then mice and a rat can become horses and a coachman.*

Irony is in part the result of unconscious thoughts; and the wide acceptance of Perrault's details can be explained only by their touching a responsive chord in the hearer. The obligation to hold on to the best in one's past; to cultivate one's sense of morality; to remain true to one's values despite adversity; not to permit oneself to be defeated by the malice or nastiness of others—all this is so obvious in "Cinderella" that Perrault cannot have remained untouched by it. The conclusion must be that he deliberately defends himself against it. His irony invalidates the demand inherent in the story that we transform ourselves through an inner process. It ridicules the idea that striving for the highest goals permits us to transcend the lowly conditions of our external existence.⁹⁵ Perrault reduces "Cinderella" to a nice fantasy with no implications for ourselves. And this is how many people want to look at the story, which accounts for the widespread acceptance of his version of it.

While this may explain Perrault's manner of reworking the old tale, it does not account for the specific details which he invented according to both his conscious and his unconscious understanding of the story, and which we accept for the same reason. Contrary to all versions in which Cinderella is forced to live among the ashes, only Perrault tells that she *chose* to do so. This makes her the prepubertal child who has not yet repressed her desire to get herself good and dirty; and who has not yet acquired an aversion to furtive little animals like rats, mice, and lizards; and who scoops out a pumpkin and imagines it to be a beautiful coach. Mice and rats inhabit dark and dirty corners and steal food, all things the child also likes to do. Unconsciously, they also arouse associations to the phallus, indicating the coming of sexual interest and maturation. Irrespective of their phallic connotations, to transform such lowly if not disgusting animals into horses, coachman, and footmen represents a sublimation. So this detail seems correct on at least two levels: it signifies the company Cinderella kept while living among the ashes in her lowly stage, if not also her phallic interests; and it seems fitting that such interests must be sublimated as she matures—i.e., prepares herself for the prince.

Perrault's rendering makes his "Cinderella" more acceptable to our conscious and unconscious understanding of what the story is all about. Consciously we are willing to accept the irony which reduces the story to a nice fantasy without serious content, since it relieves us of the otherwise implied obligation to come to terms with the problem of sibling rivalry, and of the task of internalizing our early objects and living up to their moral requirements. Unconsciously the details he adds seem convincing on the basis of our own buried childhood experiences, since they appear to indicate that to become mature we must transform and sublimate our early fascination with instinctual behavior, whether it is the attraction of dirt or of phallic objects.

Perrault's Cinderella, who goes to the ball in a coach driven by six horses attended by six footmen—as if the ball would take place at Louis XIV's Versailles—must depart before midnight, when she will be returned to her mean attire. On the third night, however, she fails to pay sufficient attention to the passage of time, and in her hurry to get away before the magic spell expires, she loses one of her glass slippers. "The guards at the gates of the palace were asked if they had not seen a princess leaving; they said that they had seen nobody leave but a young girl very badly dressed, who looked much more like a country wench than a lady."

In the Brothers Grimm's story Cinderella can stay at the ball as long as she likes. When she leaves, she does so for a purpose and not because she must. When she does leave, the prince tries to accompany her, but she slips away, hiding from him on the first night. "The son of the king waited till the father came and told him that a strange girl had jumped into the dovecote. The old man thought, 'Could it be Aschenputtel?' and they had to bring him an ax and a pick so that he could break the dovecote into two; but nobody was in it." In the meantime Cinderella has made her escape and changed back into her dirty clothes. The following day, things repeat themselves, with the exception that Cinderella hides in a pear

tree. On the third day the prince has the stairs coated with pitch, so when Cinderella again slips away, one of her slippers gets stuck there.

There are variations of the story in which Cinderella takes the initiative to be recognized, not waiting passively. In one of them the prince gives her a ring, which she bakes into a cake served to him; he will marry no other girl than the one on whose finger the ring fits.

Why does Cinderella go three times to the ball to meet the prince, only to run away from him to return to her degraded position? As it often does, the three-times-repeated behavior reflects the child's position in regard to his parents, and his reaching for his true selfhood as he works through his early conviction that he is the most important element in the threesome, and his later fear that he is the least significant. True selfhood is gained not through the three repetitions, but through something else that these lead up to—the fitting of the shoe.

On the overt level, Cinderella's evading the prince tells that she wants to be chosen for the person she really is, and not for her splendid appearance. Only if her lover has seen her in her degraded state and still desires her will she be his. But, for that, a single appearance and losing the slipper the first night would do. On a deeper level, repeating her visits to the ball symbolizes the ambivalence of the young girl who wants to commit herself personally and sexually, and at the same time is afraid to do so. It is an ambivalence which is also reflected in the father, who wonders whether the beautiful girl is his daughter Cinderella, but does not trust his feelings. The prince, as if recognizing that he cannot win Cinderella as long as she remains emotionally tied to her father in an oedipal relation, does not pursue her himself, but asks the father to do it for him. Only if the father first indicates his readiness to release his daughter from her ties to him can she feel good about transferring her heterosexual love from its immature object (the father) to its mature object—her future husband. The father's demolishing Cinderella's hiding places—chopping down the dovecote and the pear tree—shows his readiness to hand her over to the prince. But his efforts do not have the desired result.

On a quite different level, the dovecote and the pear tree stand for the magic objects which have sustained Cinderella up to this point. The first is the living place of the helpful birds which sorted out the lentils for Cinderella—substitutes for the white bird on the tree which provided her with her pretty clothes, including the fateful slippers. And the pear tree reminds us of that other tree which had grown on the mother's grave. Cinderella must relinquish her belief in and reliance on the help of magic objects if she is to live well in the world of reality. The father seems to understand this, and so he cuts down her hiding places: no more hiding among the ashes, but also no more seeking refuge from reality in magic places. From now on Cinderella will exist neither far below her true status nor way above it.

Cox, following Jacob Grimm, mentions the ancient German custom of the groom giving a shoe to his bride as sign of betrothal.⁹⁶ But this does not explain why the fit of a golden shoe decides who is the right bride in the ancient Chinese tale, and in Perrault's tale, a glass slipper. For the test to work, the shoe must be a slipper that does not stretch, or it would fit some other girl, such as the stepsisters. Perrault's subtlety is shown in his saying the shoe was made of glass, a material that does not stretch, is extremely brittle and easily broken.

A tiny receptacle into which some part of the body can slip and fit tightly can be seen as a symbol of the vagina. Something that is brittle and must not be stretched because it would break reminds us of the hymen; and something that is easily lost at the end of a ball when one's lover tries to keep his hold on his beloved seems an appropriate image for virginity, particularly when the male sets a trap—the pitch on the stairs—to catch her. Cinderella's running away from this situation could be seen as her effort to protect her virginity.

The godmother's order that Cinderella must be home by a certain hour or things will go very wrong, in Perrault's story, is similar to the parent's request that his daughter must not stay out too late at night because of his fear of what may happen if she does. The many "Cinderella" stories in which she flees to evade being ravished by an "unnatural" father support the notion that her running away from the ball is motivated by the wish to protect herself against being violated, or carried away by her own desires. It also forces the prince to seek her in her father's house, thus paralleling the groom coming to ask for the hand of his bride. While in Perrault's "Cinderella" a gentleman of the court tries the slipper on, and in the Brothers Grimm's tale the prince only hands it to Cinderella and she herself puts it on her foot, in many stories it is the prince who slips the shoe on. This might be likened to the groom's putting the ring on the finger of the bride as an important part of the marriage ceremony, a symbol of their being tied together henceforth.

All this is easily understood. On hearing the story one senses that the fitting on of the slipper is a betrothal, and it is quite clear that Cinderella is a virginal bride. Every child knows that marriage is connected with sex. In past times, when more children grew up close to animals, they knew that sex has something to do with the male putting his organ into the female, and the modern child is told as much by his parents. However, in view of the story's major topic, sibling rivalry, there are other possible symbolic meanings for the fitting of the precious slipper onto the appropriate foot.

Sibling rivalry is the topic of "Cinderella," as it is of many fairy tales. In these other fairy tales the rivalry nearly always exists among children of the same sex. But in real life, more often than not, the sharpest rivalry among the children of one family is between sister and brother.

The discrimination which females suffer when compared with males is an age-old story now being challenged. It would be strange if this discrimination did not also create jealousy and envy between sisters and brothers within the family. Psychoanalytic publications are full of examples of girls being envious of boys' sexual apparatus; the "penis envy" of the female has been a familiar concept for quite some time. Less well recognized is that this envy is by no means a one-way street; boys are also quite jealous of what girls possess: breasts, and the ability to bear children.⁹⁷

Each sex is jealous of what the other has which it lacks, much though either sex may like and be proud of what belongs to it—be it status, social role, or sexual organs. While this can be readily observed and is undoubtedly a correct view of the matter, unfortunately it is not yet widely recognized and accepted. (To some degree this is due to early psychoanalysis' one-sidedly stressing the so-called penis envy of girls, which probably occurred because at that time most treatises were written by males who did not examine their own envy of females. This is somewhat paralleled today in writings of militantly proud females.)

"Cinderella," the story which more than any other fairy tale deals with the topic of sibling rivalry, would be strangely deficient if in some fashion it did not also give expression to the rivalry of boys and girls due to their physical differences. Behind this sexual envy lies sexual fear, the so-called "castration anxiety" that some part of one's anatomy is missing. *Overtly* "Cinderella" tells only about sibling rivalry of girls; but might there not be some *covert* allusions to these other, deeper-reaching, and much more repressed emotions?

While girls and boys suffer equally severely from "castration anxiety," the feelings they suffer are not the same. Both the terms "penis envy" and "castration anxiety" stress only one of many and complex psychological aspects of the phenomena they name. According to Freudian theory, the girl's castration complex centers on her imagining that originally all children had penises and that girls somehow lost theirs (possibly as punishment for misbehavior) and on the consequent hope that it may grow back. The boy's parallel anxiety is that since all girls lack penises, this can be explained only by their having lost them, and he fears the same thing may happen to him. The girl subject to castration anxiety uses many

and varied defenses to protect her self-esteem from such imagined deficiency; among these are unconscious fantasies that she, too, has similar equipment.

To understand the unconscious thoughts and feelings which may have led to the invention of a beautiful, tiny slipper as a central feature of “Cinderella,” and, more important, the unconscious responses to this symbol which make it so convincing that “Cinderella” is one of the best-loved tales, one must accept that many different, even contradictory psychological attitudes may have become connected with the shoe as a symbol.

A very strange incident which takes place in most versions of “Cinderella” is the stepsisters’ mutilation of their feet to make them fit the tiny slipper. Although Perrault excluded this event from his story, according to Cox it is common to all “Cinderella” stories except those derived from Perrault and a few others. This incident may be viewed as a symbolic expression of some aspects of the female castration complex.

The sisters’ devious foot-mutilation is the final barrier to the happy ending; it immediately precedes the prince’s finding Cinderella. For the last time the stepsisters, with the active help of the stepmother, try to cheat Cinderella out of what rightly belongs to her. Trying to fit their feet into the shoe, the stepsisters mutilate them. In the Brothers Grimm’s story the oldest stepsister cannot enter the shoe with her big toe. So her mother hands her a knife and tells her to cut off the toe, because once she is a queen, she will no longer need to walk. The daughter does as she is told, forces her foot into the shoe, and goes to the prince, who rides off with her. As they pass Cinderella’s mother’s grave and the hazel tree, two white pigeons sitting on it call, “Look, there is blood in the shoe: the shoe is too small; the right bride still sits at home.” The prince looks at the shoe and sees blood oozing out. He returns the stepsister to her home. The other stepsister tries to put on the shoe, but her heel is too big. Again the mother tells her to cut it off, and the same sequence of events occurs. In other versions where there is only one impostor bride, she cuts off either her toe or her heel, or both. In “Rashin Coatie” it is the mother who performs the operation.

This episode reinforces the impression created previously of how gross the stepsisters are, proving that they stop at nothing to cheat Cinderella and gain their goals. Overtly the stepsisters’ behavior contrasts them sharply with Cinderella, who does not wish to gain happiness through anything but her true self. She refuses to be chosen on the basis of an appearance created by magic, and arranges things so that the prince has to see her in her ragged clothes. The stepsisters rely on deception, and their falsehood leads to their mutilation—a topic which is taken up again at the story’s end when two white birds pick out their eyes. But it is a detail of such extraordinary crudeness and cruelty that it must have been invented for some specific, although probably unconscious reason. Self-mutilations are rare in fairy tales, as contrasted to mutilations by others, which are by no means infrequent as punishment or for some other reason.

When “Cinderella” was invented, the common stereotype contrasted the bigness of the male with the smallness of the female, and Cinderella’s small feet would make her especially feminine. To have such big feet that they don’t fit the slipper makes the stepsisters more masculine than Cinderella—therefore less desirable. Desperate to gain the prince, the stepsisters do not shy away from doing anything possible to make themselves into dainty females.

The stepsisters’ efforts to trick the prince through self-mutilation are discovered by their bleeding. They tried to make themselves more female through cutting off a part of their body; bleeding is a consequence of it. They engaged in symbolic self-castration to prove their femininity; bleeding from the place on the body where this self-castration occurred may be another demonstration of their femininity, as it may stand for menstruation.

Whether or not self-mutilation or mutilation by the mother is an unconscious symbol of castration to get rid of an imagined penis; whether or not the bleeding is a symbol of menstruation, the story tells that the

stepsisters' efforts do not succeed. The birds reveal the bleeding which shows that neither of the stepsisters is the right bride. Cinderella is the virginal bride; in the unconscious, the girl who does not yet menstruate is more clearly virginal than one who already does. And the girl who permits her bleeding to be seen, particularly by a man—as the stepsisters with their bleeding feet cannot help doing—is not only coarse, but certainly less virginal than one who does not bleed. Thus it seems that this episode, on another level of unconscious understanding, contrasts the virginity of Cinderella with the absence of it in the stepsisters.

The slipper, a central feature of the “Cinderella” story and that which decides her fate, is a most complex symbol. It was probably invented out of a variety of somewhat contradictory unconscious thoughts, and hence evokes a diversity of unconscious responses in the hearer.

To the conscious mind, an object such as a slipper is just that—while symbolically in the unconscious it may in this story represent the vagina, or ideas connected with it. Fairy tales proceed on both a conscious and an unconscious level, which makes them more artistic, captivating, and convincing. Thus the objects used in them must be appropriate on the overt, conscious level while also calling forth associations quite different from their overt significance. The tiny slipper and the foot that fits it, and another mutilated one that does not, are images which make good sense to our conscious mind.

In “Cinderella” the pretty, tiny foot exercises an unconscious sexual appeal, but in conjunction with a beautiful, precious (for example, golden) slipper into which the foot fits snugly. This element of the “Cinderella” story also exists all by itself as a complete fairy tale, one reported by Strabo, much older than the ancient Chinese “Cinderella.” This tale tells of an eagle that absconds with a sandal of the beautiful courtesan Rhodope, which it drops on the pharaoh. The pharaoh is so taken with the sandal that all of Egypt is searched for the original owner so that she may become his wife.⁹⁸ This story suggests, that in ancient Egypt, as today, in certain circumstances the female slipper, as a symbol for that which is most desirable in a woman, arouses love in the male for definite but deeply unconscious reasons.

Since for over two thousand years—as Strabo's story shows—all over the world in much loved stories the female slipper has been accepted as a fairy-tale solution to the problem of finding the right bride, there must be good reasons for it. The difficulty in analyzing the unconscious meaning of the slipper as a symbol for the vagina is that although both males and females respond to this symbolic meaning, they do not do so in the same ways.* This is the subtlety but also the complexity and ambiguity of this symbol, and why it makes a strong emotional appeal to both sexes, although for different reasons. This is hardly surprising since the vagina and what it stands for in the unconscious means something different to the male and to the female; and this is particularly so until such time as both have attained full personal and sexual maturity, which is rather late in life.

In the story the prince's selection of Cinderella as his bride is based on the slipper. If the basis of his choice had been her looks or personality or any other quality, he could never have been deceived by the stepsisters. But they fooled him to the degree that he was riding off first with one, then the other of them, as his bride. The birds had to tell him that neither was the right bride because blood was oozing out of her shoe. So it was not so much the fit of the slipper which decided who was the right bride, but rather that bleeding from the foot into the slipper indicated who were the wrong choices. This was something the prince seemed unable to observe on his own, although one would think it had to be quite visible. He recognized it only after it was forced on his attention.

The prince's inability to observe the blood in the shoe suggests another part of castration anxiety, that connected with bleeding in menstruation. The blood oozing out of the slipper is but another symbolic equation of slipper-vagina, but now with the vagina bleeding as in menstruation. The prince's remaining unaware of it suggests his need to defend himself against the anxieties this arouses in him.

Cinderella is the right bride because she frees the prince of these anxieties. Her foot slips easily into the beautiful slipper, which shows that something that is dainty can be hidden within it. She does not need to mutilate herself; she does not bleed from any part of her body. Her repeated withdrawal shows that, contrary to her sisters, she is not aggressive in her sexuality but waits patiently to be chosen. But once she is chosen, she is not at all reluctant. By putting the slipper on her foot and not waiting until the prince does it, she shows her initiative and her ability to arrange her own fate. The prince had great anxiety in respect to the stepsisters, so much so that he could not see what was going on. But he has great security with Cinderella. Since she can provide this security for him, this makes her the right bride for him.

But what about Cinderella, who is, after all, the heroine of the story? Since the prince cherishes her slipper, this tells her in symbolic form that he loves her femininity as represented by the symbol of the vagina. However Cinderella may have felt about dwelling among the ashes, she knew that a person who lives thus appears to others as being dirty and uncouth. There are females who feel this way about their sexuality, and others who fear that males feel this way about it. That is why Cinderella made sure that the prince saw her in this state also before he chose her. By handing her the slipper to put her foot into, the prince symbolically expresses that he accepts her the way she is, dirty and degraded.

Here we must remember that the golden shoe was borrowed from the bird which represents the spirit of the dead mother, which Cinderella had internalized and which sustained her in her trials and tribulations. The prince, by presenting the slipper to her, finally makes the slipper and his kingdom truly hers. He symbolically offers her femininity in the form of the golden slipper-vagina: male acceptance of the vagina and love for the woman is the ultimate male validation of the desirability of her femininity. But nobody, not even a fairy-tale prince, can hand such acceptance to her—not even his love can do it. Only Cinderella herself can finally welcome her femininity, although she is helped by the prince's love. This is the deeper meaning of the story's telling that "she drew her foot out of the heavy wooden shoe and put it into the slipper, which fitted her to perfection."

At this moment, what had been a borrowed appearance of beauty while at the ball becomes Cinderella's true self; it is she who changes from the wooden shoe, which belongs to her existence among the ashes, into the golden one.

In the slipper ceremony, which signifies the betrothal of Cinderella and the prince, he selects her because in symbolic fashion she is the uncastrated woman who relieves him of his castration anxiety, which would interfere with a happy marital relationship. She selects him because he appreciates her in her "dirty" sexual aspects, lovingly accepts her vagina in the form of the slipper, and approves of her desire for a penis, symbolized by her tiny foot fitting within the slipper-vagina. That is why the prince brings the beautiful slipper to Cinderella and why she puts her tiny foot into it—only as she does so is she recognized as the right bride. But as she slips her foot into the slipper she asserts that she, too, will be active in their sexual relationship; she will do things, too. And she also gives the assurance that she is not and never was lacking in anything; she has everything that fits, as her foot snugly fits into the slipper.

A reflection on a universally accepted part of the wedding ceremony may lend support to this idea. The bride stretches out one of her fingers for the groom to slip a ring onto it. Pushing one finger through a circle made out of the thumb and index finger of the other hand is a vulgar expression for intercourse. But in the ring ceremony something entirely different is symbolically expressed. The ring, a symbol for the vagina, is given by the groom to his bride; she offers him in return her outstretched finger, so that he may complete the ritual.

Many unconscious thoughts are expressed in this ceremony. Through the ritual exchange of rings the male expresses his desire for, and acceptance of, the vagina—something about which the female may have worried—as well as of the wish she may have for a penis of her own. By having the ring put onto her finger, the bride acknowledges that from now on, her husband to some degree will have possession of

her vagina, and she of his penis; with it she will no longer feel deprived by not having one—which symbolizes the end of her castration anxiety; as his ended with his making his own, and wearing from then on, his wedding ring. The *golden* slipper that the prince hands to Cinderella to slip her foot into may be seen as but another form of this ritual, which we take so much for granted that we give little thought to its symbolic meaning, although it is with this act that the groom takes the bride for his wife.

“Cinderella” is the story of sibling rivalry and jealousy, and of how victory over them can be achieved. The greatest envy and jealousy are aroused by the sex characteristics which the one possesses and which the other lacks. Not just sibling rivalry but sexual rivalry, too, is integrated and transcended as the story of Cinderella ends. What started as utter deprivation because of jealousy ends in great happiness because of a love which understands the sources of this jealousy, accepts them, and in doing so eliminates them.

Cinderella receives from her prince that which she thought was lacking in her, as he assures her in symbolic form that she is not lacking in any respect, and that she will receive what she has wished to possess. The prince receives from Cinderella the assurance he needed most: that while all along she had a wish for a penis, she accepts that only he can satisfy it. It is an act which symbolizes that she was not castrated of her desires, and does not wish to castrate anybody; so he need not fear that this may happen to him. She receives from him what she needs most for herself; he receives from her what he needs most for himself. The slipper motif serves to pacify unconscious anxieties in the male, and to satisfy unconscious desires in the female. This permits both to find the most complete fulfillment in their sexual relation in marriage. By means of this motif, the story enlightens the hearer’s unconscious about what is involved in sex and marriage.

The child whose unconscious responds to the hidden meaning of the story, whether girl or boy, will understand better what lies behind his jealous feelings and his anxiety that he may end up the deprived one. He also will gain some inkling of the irrational anxiety which may stand in his way to forming a happy sexual relation, and what is required to achieve such a relation. But the story also assures the child that, as the heroes of the story do, so will he be able to master his anxieties and, despite all trials, there will be a happy ending.

The happy ending would be incomplete without the punishment of the antagonists. But it is neither Cinderella nor the prince who inflicts the punishment. The birds, who had helped Cinderella to sort out good from bad by picking out the lentils, now complete the destruction which the stepsisters themselves had begun: they pick out the stepsisters’ eyes. Being blinded is a symbolic statement of their blindness in thinking they could elevate themselves by degrading others; trusting their fate to outward appearances; most of all, believing that sexual happiness could be achieved by (self-)castration.

To probe into the unconscious significance of some of this best-loved fairy tale’s features, the sexual connotations must be considered. In discussing them I fear I have gone against the poet’s advice, “Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.”¹⁰¹ But dreams began to reveal their meaning and importance only when Freud dared probe into the manifold, often uncouth, and grossly sexual unconscious thoughts which are hidden behind apparently innocent surfaces. With Freud’s influence, our dreams have become much more problematic to us—more upsetting and difficult to deal with. But they are also the royal road to the unconscious mind, and they permit us to form a new and richer view of ourselves and the nature of our humanity.

The child who enjoys “Cinderella” will respond mainly to one or another of the surface meanings most of the time. But at various moments in his development toward self-understanding, depending on what is problematic to him, the child’s unconscious will be enlightened by one of the story’s hidden meanings, indicated by some important detail.¹⁰²

Overtly the story helps the child to accept sibling rivalry as a rather common fact of life and promises that he need not fear being destroyed by it; on the contrary, if these siblings were not so nasty to him, he could never triumph to the same degree at the end. Further, it tells the child that if he was once considered dirty and uncouth, this was a temporary stage with no adverse consequences for the future. There are also obvious moral lessons: that surface appearances tell nothing about the inner worth of a person; that if one is true to oneself, one wins out over those who pretend to be what they are not; and that virtue will be rewarded, evil punished.

Openly stated, but not as readily recognized, are the lessons that to develop one's personality to the fullest, one must be able to do hard work and be able to separate good from evil, as in the sorting of the lentils. Even out of lowly matter like ashes, things of great value can be gained, if one knows how to do it.

Just below the surface and quite accessible to the child's conscious mind is the importance of keeping faith with what was good in one's past, of keeping alive basic trust gained from the relation to the good mother. This faith permits achieving what is best in life; and if one finds one's way back to the values of the good mother, these help win the victory.

Regarding a child's relation not just to his mother but to his parents in general, "Cinderella" offers both parents and children important insights which no other well-known fairy tale expresses as well. These insights are of such significance that their consideration has been saved for the end of this discussion. Being so clearly inherent in the story that they cannot fail to make an impression, these messages make a greater impact just because we do not consciously spell out to ourselves what they are. Without our "knowing" it, the lessons become part of our understanding about life when we make this fairy tale part of ourselves.

In no other popular fairy tale are the good and the bad mother put so clearly into juxtaposition. Even in "Snow White," which tells about one of the worst stepmothers, the stepmother does not set impossible tasks for her daughter, or demand hard work of her. Nor does she reappear at the end in the form of the original good mother, to arrange for her child's happiness. But hard work and seemingly impossible tasks are what Cinderella's stepmother requires of her. On the overt level the story tells all about how Cinderella finds her prince *despite* what the stepmother does to her. But in the unconscious, particularly for the young child, "despite" is often tantamount to "because of."

Without having first been forced to become a "Cinderella," the heroine would never have become the bride of the prince; the story makes this quite obvious. In order to achieve personal identity and gain self-realization on the highest level, the story tells us, both are needed: the original good parents, and later the "step"-parents who seem to demand "cruelly" and "insensitively." The two together make up the "Cinderella" story. If the good mother did not for a time turn into the evil stepmother, there would be no impetus to develop a separate self, to discover the difference between good and evil, develop initiative and self-determination. Witness the fact that the stepsisters, to whom the stepmother remains the good mother throughout the story, never achieve any of this; they remain empty shells. When the slipper does not fit the stepsisters, it is not they who take action, but their mother who tells them to. All this is given emphasis by the sisters' remaining blind—i.e., insensitive—for the rest of their lives, a symbol, but also the logical consequence of having failed to develop a personality of their own.

For the possibility of a development toward individuation to exist, a firm basis is needed—"basic trust," which we can gain only from the relationship between the infant and the good parents. But for the process of individuation to become possible and necessary—and unless it becomes unavoidable we do not engage in it, for it is much too painful—the good parents have to appear for a period as bad, persecuting ones who send the child out to wander for years in his personal desert, demanding seemingly "without respite" and without consideration for the child's comfort. But if the child responds to these hardships by developing his self in an independent way, then as if by miracle the good parents reappear. This is similar to the parent who does not make any sense to his adolescent child until after the adolescent has achieved maturity.

“Cinderella” sets forth the steps in personality development required to reach self-fulfillment, and presents them in fairy-tale fashion so that every person can understand what is required of him to become a full human being. This is hardly surprising, since the fairy tale, as I have tried to show throughout this book, represents extremely well the workings of our psyche: what our psychological problems are, and how these can best be mastered. Erikson, in his model of the human life-cycle, suggests that the ideal human being develops through what he calls “phase-specific psychosocial crises” if he achieves the ideal goals of each phase in succession. These crises in their sequence are: First, basic trust—represented by Cinderella’s experience with the original good mother, and what this firmly implanted in her personality. Second, autonomy—as Cinderella accepts her unique role and makes the best of it. Third, initiative—Cinderella develops this as she plants the twig and makes it grow with the expression of her personal feelings, tears and prayers. Fourth, industry—represented by Cinderella’s hard labors, such as sorting out the lentils. Fifth, identity—Cinderella escapes from the ball, hides in the dovecote and tree, and insists that the prince see and accept her in her negative identity as “Cinderella” before she assumes her positive identity as his bride, because any true identity has its negative as well as its positive aspects. According to Erikson’s scheme, having ideally solved these psychosocial crises by having achieved the personality attributes just enumerated, one becomes ready for true intimacy with the other.¹⁰³

The difference between what happens to the stepsisters, who remain tied to their “good parents” without inner development, and the hardships and significant developments Cinderella has to undergo when her original good parents are replaced by step-parents, permits every child and parent to understand that, in the child’s best interests, for a time he needs to see even the best of parents as rejecting and demanding “step”-parents. If “Cinderella” makes an impression on parents, it can help them accept that as an inescapable step in their child’s development toward true maturity, they must seem for a time to have turned into bad parents. The story also tells that when the child has attained his true identity, the good parents will be resuscitated in his mind, prove much more powerful, and replace permanently the image of the bad parents.

Thus, “Cinderella” offers parents much-needed comfort, for it can teach them why and for what good purposes they are seen temporarily in a bad light by their child. The child learns from “Cinderella” that to gain his kingdom he must be ready to undergo a “Cinderella” existence for a time, not just in regard to the hardships this entails, but also in regard to the difficult tasks he must master on his own initiative. Depending on the child’s stage of psychological development, this kingdom which Cinderella achieves will be one either of unlimited gratification or of individuality and unique personal achievement.

Unconsciously, children and adults also respond to the other assurances “Cinderella” offers: that despite the seemingly devastating oedipal conflicts which caused Cinderella’s dejected state, the disappointment in the parent of the other sex and the good mother turned stepmother, Cinderella will have a good life, even a better one than her parents. Further, the story tells that even castration anxiety is only a figment of the child’s anxious imagination: in a good marriage everyone will find the sexual fulfillment even of what seemed impossible dreams: he will gain a golden vagina, she a temporary penis.

“Cinderella” guides the child from his greatest disappointments—oedipal disillusionment, castration anxiety, low opinion of himself because of the imagined low opinion of others—toward developing his autonomy, becoming industrious, and gaining a positive identity of his own. Cinderella, at the story’s end, is indeed ready for a happy marriage. But does she love the prince? Nowhere does the story say so. It takes Cinderella up to the moment of engagement as the prince hands her the golden slipper, which might as well be the golden wedding ring (as indeed it is a ring in some “Cinderella” stories).¹⁰⁴ But what else must Cinderella learn? What other experiences are needed to show the child what it means to be truly in love? The answer to this question is provided in the last cycle of stories we shall consider in this book, that of the animal groom.

*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.⁷⁵

*In one story of the “Brother and Sister” type, “*La Mala Matrè*,” the children kill an evil mother on the advice of a female teacher and, as in Basile’s story, ask their father to marry the teacher.⁸¹ This tale, like Basile’s, is of South Italian origin, so it seems likely that one served as a model for the other.

*It is unfortunate that “Cinderella” became known by this name in English, an all-too-facile and incorrect translation of the French “*Cendrillon*,” which, like the German name of the heroine, stresses her living among ashes. “Ashes” and not “cinders” is the correct translation of the French *cendre*, which is derived from the Latin term for ashes, *cinerem*. The *Oxford English Dictionary* makes a special point of noting that “cinders” is not connected etymologically with the French word “*cendres*.” This is important in regard to the connotations that attach themselves to the name of “Cinderella,” since ashes are the very clean powdery substance which is the residue of complete combustion; cinders, to the contrary, are the quite dirty remnants of an incomplete combustion.

*The purity of the priestess responsible for the sacred fire, and fire itself, which purifies, evoke appropriate connotations also to ashes. In many societies ashes were used for ablutions, as a means of cleansing oneself. This was one of the connotations of ashes, although today it is no longer widespread.

The other connotation of ashes is to mourning. Sprinkling ashes over the head, as on Ash Wednesday, is still a sign of bereavement as it was in ancient times. Sitting among the ashes as a reaction to, and a sign of, mourning is mentioned in the *Odyssey*, and was practiced among many peoples.⁸⁸ By making Cinderella sit among cinders, and basing her name on it, these connotations to purity and to deep mourning which are connected with her original name in the Italian story (which by far antedates Perrault’s tale), as much as with her French and German names, have become changed in English to the exact opposite connotations, referring to blackness and dirtiness.

*As for the lizards, Soriano reminds us of the French expression “lazy as a lizard,” which explains why Perrault may have chosen these animals to be transformed into footmen, whose laziness was a matter for jokes.⁹⁴

*A wide variety of folklore data supports the notion that the slipper can serve as a symbol for the vagina. Rooth, quoting Jameson, reports that among the Manchu a bride is expected to present gifts of slippers to her husband’s brothers, who, since group marriage is practiced, become her sexual partners through her marriage. These slippers are ornamented with “*lien hua*,” which is a vulgar term for the female genitals.⁹⁹

Jameson cites several instances of the slipper used as a sexual symbol in China, and Aigremont supplies examples of this from Europe and the East.¹⁰⁰

NOTES

[73.](#) For the fact that “Cinderella” is the best known of all fairy tales, see *Funk and Wagnalls Dictionary of Folklore* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1950). Also Opie and Opie, *op. cit.*

For its being the best loved of fairy stories, see Collier and Gaier, *op. cit.*

[74.](#) For the earliest Chinese story of the “Cinderella” type, see Arthur Waley, “Chinese Cinderella Story,” *Folk-Lore*, vol. 58 (1947).

[75.](#) For the history of footwear, including sandals and slippers, see R. T. Wilcox, *The Mode of Footwear* (New York, 1948).

For an even more detailed discussion, including the edict of Diocletian, see E. Jaefert, *Skomod och skotillverkning fran medeltiden vara dagar* (Stockholm, 1938).

[76.](#) For the origin and meaning of “Aschenbrödel,” and for many other details of the story, see Bolte and Polivka, *op. cit.*, and Anna B. Rooth, *The Cinderella Cycle* (Lund: Gleerup, 1951).

[77.](#) Barnes, *op. cit.*

[78.](#) B. Rubenstein, “The Meaning of the Cinderella Story in the Development of a Little Girl,” *American Imago*, vol. 12 (1955).

[79.](#) “*La Gatta Cenerentola*” is the Sixth Diversion of the First Day of Basile’s *Pentamerone*, *op. cit.*

[80.](#) The idea of letting the lid of a chest fall on a person’s neck to kill him is extremely rare, although it appears in one of the Brothers Grimm’s stories, “The Juniper Tree,” in which an evil stepmother thus kills her stepson. It probably is of historical origin. Gregory (St. Gregorius) of Tours in his *History of the Franks* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1916) tells that Queen Fredegund (who died in 597) tried to kill her own daughter Rigundis in this manner, but the daughter was saved by servants rushing to her aid. The reason Queen Fredegund tried to kill her daughter was that Rigundis asserted that she should be in her mother’s place because she was “better”—that is, born as a king’s daughter, while her mother had started life as a chambermaid. Thus, oedipal arrogance of a daughter—“I am better suited than my mother for her place”—leads to the mother’s oedipal revenge by trying to eliminate the daughter who wished to replace her.

[81.](#) “*La mala matrè*” in A. de Nino, *Usi e costumi abruzzesi*, vol. 3: *Fiabe* (Florence, 1883–7).

[82.](#) Various tales in the center of which stands the Cinderella motif are discussed in Marian R. Cox, *Cinderella: Three Hundred and Forty-five Variants* (London: David Nutt, 1893).

[83.](#) This can be illustrated by a famous error which occurred during the early days of psychoanalysis. Freud, on the basis of what his female patients told him while in psychoanalysis—their dreams, free associations, recollections—concluded that as small children they all had been seduced by their fathers, and that this was the cause of their neuroses. Only when patients whose early life histories were well known to him had similar memories—although he knew that no such seduction had occurred in these cases—did Freud realize that paternal seduction could not possibly be as frequent as he had been led to believe. It then became apparent to him—and since then it has been corroborated in innumerable instances—that what his female patients recollected was not something that had happened, but what they wished would have happened. As young girls, during their oedipal period, they had desired that their

fathers would be deeply in love with them and so wish to have them for wives, or at least lovers. They had wished it so passionately that they vividly imagined that it was so. Later, when they recalled the content of these fantasies, it was with such intensity of feeling that they were convinced that this could only be because of events which actually had taken place. They themselves had done nothing to provoke the paternal seduction, so they claimed and believed; it had been all their fathers' doing. In short, they had been as innocent as Cinderella.

After Freud had realized that these memories of seduction did not refer to things that had happened in reality, but only to fantasies, and therefore helped his patients to probe more deeply into their unconscious, then it became apparent that not only had a wish been taken for its having been fulfilled, but that the patients when little girls had been far from innocent. They had not only desired to be seduced and imagined that this was so, but also had tried to seduce their fathers in their childish ways—for example, by displaying themselves or in many other ways courting Father's love. (Sigmund Freud, "An Autobiographical Study," *New Introductory Lectures to Psychoanalysis*, etc., *op. cit.*, vols. 20, 22.)

[84.](#) For example in "Cap o' Rushes," Briggs, *op. cit.*

[85.](#) Perrault's "Cinderella" is reprinted in Opie and Opie, *op. cit.* Unfortunately, as in nearly all other English translations, the verses setting forth the story's moral are not included.

For the Brothers Grimm's "Aschenputtel," see Grimm, *op. cit.*

[86.](#) "Rashin Coatie," Briggs, *op. cit.*

[87.](#) Stith Thompson, *Motif Index ...*, *op. cit.*, and *The Folk Tale* (New York: Dryden Press, 1946).

[88.](#) For the ritual meaning of ashes, and for the role of ashes in purifications and in mourning, see the article "Ashes" in James Hastings, *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (New York: Scribner, 1910). For the meaning and uses of ashes in folklore, and its role in fairy tales, see the article "Asche" in Bächtold-Stäubli, *op. cit.*

[89.](#) "Rashin Coatie," or a tale much like it, is mentioned in the *Complaynt of Scotland* (1540), edited by Murray (1872).

[90.](#) This Egyptian tale is reported in René Basset, *Contes populaires d'Afrique* (Paris: Guilmoto, 1903).

[91.](#) Erik H. Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle, Psychological Issues*, vol. 1 (1959) (New York: International Universities Press, 1959).

[92.](#) In an Icelandic "Cinderella" story, the dead mother appears to the mistreated heroine in a dream and provides her with a magic object which keeps her going until a prince finds her shoe, etc. Jon Arnason, *Folk Tales of Iceland* (Leipzig, 1862–4) and *Icelandic Folktales and Legends* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).

[93.](#) For the various tasks asked of Cinderella, see Rooth, *op. cit.*

[94.](#) Soriano, *op. cit.*

[95.](#) This ridiculing of the Cinderella story he just told is highlighted by what Soriano calls "the bitter irony" of the second morality with which Perrault concludes his tale. In it he says that while it is advantageous to possess intelligence, courage, and other good qualities, these do not amount to much ("*ce seront choses vaines*") if one does not have godfathers or godmothers to make them count.

[96.](#) Cox, *op. cit.*

[97.](#) Bruno Bettelheim, *Symbolic Wounds* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1954).

[98.](#) The story of Rhodope is told by Strabo in *The Geography of Strabo*, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann, 1932).

[99.](#) Rooth, *op. cit.*

[100.](#) Raymond de Loy Jameson, *Three Lectures on Chinese Folklore* (Peiping: Publications of the College of Chinese Studies, 1932).

Aigremont, “*Fuss- und Schuh-Symbolik und Erotik*,” *Anthropopyteia*, vol. 5 (Leipzig, 1909).

[101.](#) “Tread softly because you tread on my dreams,” from the poem “He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven,” in William Butler Yeats, *The Collected Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1956).

[102.](#) One might rightly be worried, for example, if a child consciously recognized that the golden slipper could be a symbol for the vagina, as one would be concerned if he consciously understood the sexual content of the well-known nursery rhyme:

*Cock a doodle do!
My dame has lost her shoe;
My master’s lost his fiddle stick;
And they don’t know what to do!*

And this although the slang meaning of the first word is by now quite well known even to children. In the rhyme the shoe is used in the same symbolic meaning as in “Cinderella.” If the child understood what this nursery rhyme is all about, he would indeed “not know what to do!” And the same would be true if he understood—as no child does—all the hidden meanings of “Cinderella,” only some of which I have tried to spell out, and even those only to a certain degree.

[103.](#) Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle*, *op. cit.*; *Identity, Youth, and Crisis*, *op. cit.*

[104.](#) “Cinderella” stories in which a ring and not a slipper leads to her recognition are (among others) “*Maria Intaulata*” and “*Maria Intauradda*,” both in *Archivio per lo Studio delle Tradizioni Popolari*, vol. 2 (Palermo, 1882), and “*Les Souliers*,” in Auguste Dozon, *Contes Albanais* (Paris, 1881).

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The fairy-tale literature is so vast that nobody has attempted to collect all the tales. Probably the most satisfactory and readily available collection in English is that edited by Andrew Lang and published in his twelve volumes titled: *The Blue, Brown, Crimson, Green, Grey, Lilac, Olive, Orange, Pink, Red, Violet, and Yellow Fairy Book*. Originally published by Longmans, Green, and Co., London, 1889 ff., these books have been recently republished by Dover Publications, New York, 1965 ff.

The most ambitious undertaking in this field is the German collection *Die Märchen der Weltliteratur*. Publication was begun in 1912 by Diederichs in Jena with Friedrich von der Leyen and Paul Zaunert as editors. So far, some seventy volumes have appeared. With very few exceptions, each volume is devoted to fairy tales of only one language or culture; hence only a very small selection of fairy tales of each culture is included. To give only one example, the collection made by Leo Frobenius, *Atlantis: Volksmärchen und Volksdichtungen aus Afrika* (Munich: Forschungsinstitut für Kulturmorphologie, 1921–8), consists of twelve volumes, and nonetheless contains only a quite limited selection of the fairy tales of that continent.

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