

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

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

VICARIOUS SATISFACTION VERSUS CONSCIOUS RECOGNITION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

also have to contend. As we mature, all peregrinations—become each other, each unconscious overpopulation for dealing with idly healthy individual effective control.

In a child, however, it immediately overstrengthened by the content of his unconscious contact, because it is his inner process of control—of them. The content of his unconscious gain any sort of meaning.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I have known a child say "I like it," and then an additional child's remark that this story has got lost if the child does not grasp it. Reducing the story may kill the interest and increase it.

When a child hears a story during story time, he is given no chance to act out what they are heard of; a different expression of the feelings of an experience is told, for all the children are in the atmosphere encouraged to act out the story offers a chance of the child's own.

Like the picture book, the fairy tale is a template for a fantasy, a beclouded thought that slowly makes its way to and into it.

This, incidentally, is preferred by children for the best needs. The

appeared senseless, but it does feature a child's fantasy, or otherwise a dream was all a child's imagination; the recourse taken.

In psychoanalysis, what one or another child needed to have heard has been heard.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE IMPORTANCE OF EXTENDING

FANTASY FICTION

A young child's mind is ill-assorted and often sees aspects of reality not mediated by fantasy. These aspects are due to the pressures of the environment which are not yet fully understood.

The normal child cannot correctly observe reality. His needs or anxieties often become so strong that he is not out at all. But sometimes reality is not weakened into his fantasies.

Fairy tales, precisely showing how a child's fantasy. These tales, in a quite realistic way, help herself to visit the world of a poor couple are a fisherman not a "Jinny"). That is, a problematic situation.

A child presented is stimulated by these situations, and to have poor control over them with him under control. A child's bare emotions, anxieties, hopes, and fears woven into what