standing for inner and outer struggles. But deep concentration is also required for personal growth. This is typically symbolized in fairy tales by years devoid of overt events, suggesting inner, silent developments. Thus, the physical escape of the child from his parents' domination is followed by a lengthy period of recovery, of gaining maturity.

In the story, after Rapunzel's banishment into the desert, the time comes when she is no longer taken care of by her substitute mother, nor the prince by his parents. Both of them now have to learn to take care of themselves, even in the most adverse circumstances. Their relative immaturity is suggested by their having given up hope—not trusting the future really means not trusting oneself. That is why neither the prince nor Rapunzel is able to search with determination for the other. He, we are told, "wandered blindly through the forest, ate nothing but roots and berries, and did nothing but moan and cry because he had lost his beloved." Nor are we told that Rapunzel did much of a positive nature; she too lived in misery and moaned and decried her fate. We must assume, nevertheless, that it was for both a period of growing, of finding themselves, an era of recovery. At its end they are ready not only to rescue each other, but to make a good life, one for the other.

ON THE TELLING OF FAIRY STORIES

To attain to the full its consoling propensities, its symbolic meanings, and, most of all, its interpersonal meanings, a fairy tale should be told rather than read. If it is read, it ought to be read with emotional involvement in the story and in the child, with empathy for what the story may mean to him. Telling is preferable to reading because it permits greater flexibility.

It was mentioned before that the folk fairy tale, as distinct from more recently invented fairy tales, is the result of a story being shaped and reshaped by being told millions of times, by different adults to all kinds of other adults and children. Each narrator, as he told the story, dropped and added elements to make it more meaningful to himself and to the listeners, whom he knew well. When talking to a child, the

adult responded to what he surmised from the child's reactions. Thus the narrator let his unconscious understanding of what the story told be influenced by that of the child. Successive narrators adapted the story according to the questions the child asked, the delight and fear he expressed openly or indicated by the way he snuggled up against the adult. Slavishly sticking to the way a fairy story is printed robs it of much of its value. The telling of the story to a child, to be most effective, has to be an interpersonal event, shaped by those who participate in it.

There is no getting around the possibility that this also contains some pitfalls. A parent not attuned to his child, or too beholden to what goes on in his own unconscious, may choose to tell fairy tales on the basis of *his* needs—rather than those of the child. But even if he does, all is not lost. The child will better understand what moves his parent, and this is of great interest and value to him in comprehending the motives of those most important in his life.

An example of this occurred when a father was about to leave his much more competent wife and his five-year-old son, both of whom he had failed to support for some time. He worried that his son would be entirely in the power of his wife, whom he thought of as a domineering woman, when he was no longer around. One evening the boy requested that the father tell him a bedtime story. His father chose "Hansel and Gretel"; and when the narrative reached the point where Hansel had been put into the cage and was being fattened to be eaten by the witch, the father began to yawn and said he felt too tired to continue; he left the boy, went to bed, and fell asleep. Thus Hansel was left in the power of the devouring witch without any support—as the father thought that he was about to leave his son in the power of his dominant wife.

Although only five years old, the boy understood that his father was about to abandon him, and that his father thought his mother a threatening person, but that he nonetheless saw no way to protect or to rescue his son. While the boy may have had a bad night, he decided that since there seemed to be no hope of his father's taking good care of him, he would have to come to terms with the situation he faced with his mother. The next day he told his mother what had happened, and spontaneously added that even if Father were not around, he knew that Mother would always take good care of him.

Fortunately, children not only know how to deal with such parental distortions of fairy tales, but they also have their own ways of dealing with story elements which run counter to their emotional needs. They

do this by changing the story around and remembering it differently from its original version, or by adding details to it. The fantastic ways in which the stories unfold encourage such spontaneous changes; stories which deny the irrational in us do not as easily permit such variations. It is fascinating to view the changes which even the most widely known stories undergo in the minds of individuals, notwithstanding the fact that the story's events are such common knowledge.

One boy reversed the story of Hansel and Gretel so that it was Gretel who was put in the cage, and Hansel who conceived of the idea of using a bone to fool the witch, and who pushed her into the oven, thereby freeing Gretel. To add some female distortions of fairy tales which made them conform to individual needs: a girl remembered "Hansel and Gretel" with the change that it was the father who insisted that the children had to be cast out, despite his wife's entreaties not to do so, and that the father did his evil deed behind his wife's back.

A young lady remembered "Hansel and Gretel" mainly as a story depicting Gretel's dependency on her older brother, and objected to its "male chauvinistic" character. As far as her recollection of the story went—and she claimed to remember it very vividly—it was Hansel who managed to escape by his own wits and who pushed the witch into the oven and thus rescued Gretel. On rereading the story, she was much surprised by the way her memory had distorted it, but realized that all through her childhood she had relished her dependence on a somewhat older brother and, as she put it, "I have been unwilling to accept my own strength and the responsibilities that go along with that awareness." There was another reason why in early adolescence this distortion was strongly reinforced. While her brother had been abroad, her mother had died and she had had to make the arrangements for the cremation. Therefore, even on rereading the fairy tale as an adult she felt revulsion at the idea that it was Gretel who was responsible for the witch being burned to death; it reminded her too painfully of the cremation of her mother. Unconsciously she had understood the story well, especially the degree to which the witch represented the bad mother about whom we all harbor negative feelings, but feel guilty about them. Another girl recalled with rich detail how Cinderella's going to the ball was made possible by her father, despite the stepmother's objections.

I mentioned before that, ideally, the telling of a fairy story should be an interpersonal event into which adult and child enter as equal partners, as can never be the case when a story is read to a child. A story of Goethe's childhood illustrates this.

Long before Freud spoke about id and superego, Goethe from his own experience divined that they were the building blocks of personality. Fortunately for him, in his life each of the two was represented by a parent. "From father I got my bearings, the seriousness in life's pursuits; from mother the enjoyment of life, and love of spinning fantasies."[49] Goethe knew that to be able to enjoy life, to make the hard work of it palatable, we need a rich fantasy life. The account of how Goethe gained some of this ability and self-confidence through his mother's telling him fairy tales illustrates how fairy tales ought to be told, and how they can bind parent and child together by each making his own contributions. Goethe's mother recounted in her old age:

"Air, fire, water and earth I presented to him as beautiful princesses, and everything in all nature took on a deeper meaning," she reminisced. "We invented roads between stars, and what great minds we would encounter. . . . He devoured me with his eyes; and if the fate of one of his favorites did not go as he wished, this I could see from the anger in his face, or his efforts not to break out in tears. Occasionally he interfered by saying: 'Mother, the princess will *not* marry the miserable tailor, even if he slays the giant,' at which I stopped and postponed the catastrophe until the next evening. So my imagination often was replaced by his; and when the following morning I arranged fate according to his suggestions and said, 'You guessed it, that's how it came out,' he was all excited, and one could see his heart beating."[50]

Not every parent can invent stories as well as Goethe's mother—who during her lifetime was known as a great teller of fairy stories. She told the stories in line with her listeners' inner feelings of how things should proceed in the tale, and this was considered the right way to tell these stories. Unfortunately, many modern parents were never themselves told fairy tales as children; and, having thus been deprived of the intense pleasure, and enrichment of the inner life, that these stories give to a child, even the best of parents cannot be spontaneous in providing his child with what was absent from his own experience. In that case, an intellectual understanding of how meaningful a fairy tale can be for his child, and why, must replace direct empathy based on recollections of one's own childhood.

When speaking here of an intellectual understanding of the meaning of a fairy tale, it should be emphasized that it will not do to approach the telling of fairy tales with didactic intentions. When in various contexts throughout this book it is mentioned that a fairy tale helps the child to understand himself, guides him to find solutions to the problems that beset him, etc., this is always meant metaphorically.

If listening to a fairy tale permits a child to achieve this for himself, that he may be able to do so was not the conscious intention either of those who in the dim past invented a story, or of those who in retelling it hand it down the generations. The purpose in telling a fairy story ought to be that of Goethe's mother: a shared experience of enjoying the tale, although what makes for this enjoyment may be quite different for child and adult. While the child enjoys the fantasy, the adult may well derive his pleasure from the child's enjoyment; while the child may be elated because he now understands something about himself better, the adult's delight in telling the story may derive from the child's experiencing a sudden shock of recognition.

A fairy tale is most of all a work of art, about which Goethe said in his prologue to *Faust,* "Who offers many things will offer some to many a one."[51] This implies that any deliberate attempt to offer something specific to a particular person cannot be the purpose of a work of art. Listening to a fairy tale and taking in the images it presents may be compared to a scattering of seeds, only some of which will be implanted in the mind of the child. Some of these will be working in his conscious mind right away; others will stimulate processes in his unconscious. Still others will need to rest for a long time until the child's mind has reached a state suitable for their germination, and many will never take root at all. But those seeds which have fallen on the right soil will grow into beautiful flowers and sturdy trees—that is, give validity to important feelings, promote insights, nourish hopes, reduce anxieties—and in doing so enrich the child's life at the moment and forever after. Telling a fairy tale with a particular purpose other than that of enriching the child's experience turns the fairy story into a cautionary tale, a fable, or some other didactic experience which at best speaks to the child's conscious mind, while reaching the child's unconscious directly also is one of the greatest merits of this literature.

If the parent tells his child fairy tales in the right spirit—that is, with feelings evoked in himself both through remembering the meaning the story had for him when he was a child, and through its different present meaning to him; and with sensitivity for the reasons why his child may also derive some personal meaning from hearing the tale —then, as he listens, the child feels understood in his most tender longings, his most ardent wishes, his most severe anxieties and feelings of misery, as well as in his highest hopes. Since what the parent tells him in some strange way happens also to enlighten him about what goes on in the darker and irrational aspects of his mind, this shows the

child that he is not alone in his fantasy life, that it is shared by the person he needs and loves most. In such favorable conditions, fairy tales subtly offer suggestions on how to deal constructively with these inner experiences. The fairy story communicates to the child an intuitive, subconscious understanding of his own nature and of what his future may hold if he develops his positive potentials. He senses from fairy tales that to be a human being in this world of ours means having to accept difficult challenges, but also encountering wondrous adventures.

One must never "explain" to the child the meanings of fairy tales. However, the narrator's understanding of the fairy tale's message to the child's preconscious mind is important. The narrator's comprehension of the tale's many levels of meaning facilitates the child's deriving from the story clues for understanding himself better. It furthers the adult's sensitivity to selection of those stories which are most appropriate to the child's state of development, and to the specific psychological difficulties he is confronted with at the moment.

Fairy tales describe inner states of the mind by means of images and actions. As a child recognizes unhappiness and grief when a person is crying, so the fairy tale does not need to enlarge on somebody's being unhappy. When Cinderella's mother dies, we are not told that Cinderella grieved for her mother or mourned the loss and felt lonely, deserted, desperate, but simply that "every day she went out to her mother's grave and wept."

In fairy tales, internal processes are translated into visual images. When the hero is confronted by difficult inner problems which seem to defy solution, his psychological state is not described; the fairy story shows him lost in a dense, impenetrable wood, not knowing which way to turn, despairing of finding the way out. To everybody who has heard fairy tales, the image and feeling of being lost in a deep, dark forest are unforgettable.

Unfortunately, some moderns reject fairy tales because they apply to this literature standards which are totally inappropriate. If one takes these stories as descriptions of reality, then the tales are indeed outrageous in all respects—cruel, sadistic, and whatnot. But as symbols of psychological happenings or problems, these stories are quite true.

That is why it depends largely on the narrator's feelings about a fairy tale whether it falls flat or is cherished. The loving grandmother who tells the tale to a child who, sitting on her lap, listens to it enraptured will communicate something very different than a parent who,

bored by the story, reads it to several children of quite different ages out of a sense of duty. The adult's sense of active participation in telling the story makes a vital contribution to, and greatly enriches, the child's experience of it. It entails an affirmation of his personality through a particular shared experience with another human being who, though an adult, can fully appreciate the feelings and reactions of the child.

If, as we tell the story, the agonies of sibling rivalry do not reverberate in us, as well as the desperate feeling of rejection the child has when he doesn't feel he is thought the best; his feelings of inferiority when his body fails him; his dismal sense of inadequacy if he or others expect the performance of tasks that seem Herculean; his anxiety about the "animal" aspects of sex; and how all this and so much more can be transcended—then we fail the child. In this failure we also fail to give the child the conviction that after all his labors a wonderful future is awaiting him—and only this belief can give him the strength to grow up well, securely, with self-confidence and self-respect.