



The Fairy Tale of the Crystal Ball

A Path Toward a New Thinking

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A fairy tale's authenticity can be measured by its potential to charm and captivate, but also by its potential to evoke rejection. An intuitive awareness of quality and a sensibility to the precious gem buried underneath the fairy tale's simple appearance make us receptive to its message, whereas the intellect's inability to think in images may be responsible for a lack of appreciation and understanding. Some modern editions of fairy tales with their corruptions of traditional texts give evidence to such lack of understanding. An unacknowledged fear of the inner realm of the spirit appears to be the main reason for our helplessness in relation to images.

Poems are like painted windowpanes!
In gloomy dark the church remains,
If from the market place you view them:
That's how the dilettante peers through them.
Therefore, his mind is glum and shrouded,
And all his life his eyes are clouded.
But if you care to come inside
To greet the holy chapel here,
You'll find its colors bright and clear.
Each ornament, each chandelier
Is flooded now with precious light.
God's children, come and claim the prize.¹

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's metaphorical characterization of the poem may also be applied to fairy tale images: They are like "painted window-panes," whose beauty does not shine forth unless they are illuminated by the light of the interior. If modern human beings were to enter this inner realm, they could discover entirely new spiritual perspectives for themselves and for the world.

Where does the fairy tale lead us?

Its path leads us out of the "parentally" guarded world through temptation and error toward truth, through fear and peril of death into a new realm of life. In superior style the fairy tale takes the hurdles placed by the limits of modern consciousness of space and time. In this respect the effort to gain a deeper understanding of fairy tales can become an exercise toward a spirit-filled expansion of our physical-material consciousness.

To reflect on fairy tales is to reflect on images—on images that have been experienced, not just invented. These images have their origin in the ancient mysteries of ancient peoples, taught and experienced in the so-called "academies" of antiquity. The purpose of these mystery schools, whose wisdom echoes in myths and fairy tales, was human self-education. Like any good teacher, the fairy tale accompanies the human soul from the unconsciousness of its instinctive state toward the consciousness of its thinking state, guiding and strengthening it thereby for a future worthy of human beings.

Whether as the result of diligent scientific study, or whether instinctively, when imparting their wisdom, the Egyptian sages do not use written alphabetic characters, which are imitations of voice and speech, for expressing their teachings and principles. Instead, they draw pictures, and in their temples they record the thought content that goes with each separate thing in hieroglyphic pictures, so that each picture is the embodiment of a specific content of knowledge and wisdom, an object and an integrity that transcend explanation and discussion. The content is then elicited from the picture and expressed in words, and the reason is found why it is as it is, and not otherwise.²

The fairy tale of the crystal ball does not merely tell of enchantment—it enchants! The listening soul, spellbound by the fascinating chain of events, is drawn into the magic ring that encircles beginning and end of the tale—opening with the figure of the enchantress, mother of three sons, and closing with the figure of the enchanter, father of the princess. All the figures that move within the field of tension between enchanter and enchantress—with one exception—are prevented from showing their true forms.

However, within this oppressive circle the forces start to move. And the more the outer magical force makes itself felt, the stronger, the more dramatic, the more ready for battle becomes the inner urge for liberation. In fact, the more dramatic the battle becomes, the smaller and more endangered becomes the contested substance: *the crystal ball*. Only one of the figures, *the youngest*, follows his path with unwavering courage. With intuitive wakefulness he escapes from the magic power of the mother to start off on his path toward reuniting what had been separated.

Exactly who are all those appearing and disappearing figures of this heart-stirring soul drama? Which force is symbolized by the *witch*? Who are *the three* who belong together as intimately as sincerely loving brothers? Who is *the third*? What is concealed in the image of *the two giants quarreling about an old hat*? What is portrayed in the mysterious *mirror encounter on the high mountain*? What is pictured in the *elemental struggles* which result in ever new conditions and configurations, and eventually, what is the significance of the threefold image of transformation?

1. The *death of the bull* becomes the element of transformation into the *firebird*.
2. The *fear of the bird* becomes the impulse toward the *birth of the egg*.
3. The *shock brought about by the water* becomes the stimulant for the process of *crystallization*.

Let us now focus our attention on the image of the witch. Another fairy tale image that appears to people of our modern age as far from reality as that of the witch is hard to find and yet on closer inspection we will realize that the witch is one of the key motifs and can help us to decipher the deeper meaning of the fairy tale riddle.

The German word for witch is *Hexe*; it is derived from the Old High German word *hagazussa*.³ In mythological times she was the wise old woman, the old *hag*, the prophetess, the priestess and clairvoyant guardian of her tribe. By virtue of her motherly authority, she guarded the borders of her family. (Old High German *hag*: an area secured by a *hedge*; German *hecke*: hedge).

While humanity was passing through its childhood phase, absolute power was vested in spiritual authorities (gods, guru-priests, kings, etc.) over their authority-seeking, spiritually dependent pupils. This was quite legitimate during that particular period of human development. As the child approaches the end of his childhood, he wants to leave his “mythological” enclosure and free himself from parental authority to become his own authority. In like manner humanity at large arrived at the end of its childhood period and entered a new phase of development during which the clairvoyant matriarchal claim of the mother (the

hagazussa) to guard and to guide lost its legitimacy. Humanity wanted to wake up to its own independence. Wherever the hagazussa was not willing to give up her claim to authority, her originally benevolent white magic changed into destructive black magic. The hagazussa became the *witch*.

If we now proceed to “elicit the content from the picture,” as the Greek philosopher Plotinus describes it, we realize: *The witch is the force within myself that resists development and anxiously clings to the old.*

There is a spiritual principle though: the law of change and renewal. What is right for a particular time and for a particular state of consciousness may be wrong at a later stage of development; it may even turn into the opposite. Carried over into our modern human situation this means: Old paths of teaching and old methods of training (yoga, TM, drugs, etc.), which may have been necessary at some time in the past for the development of the childlike-mythological human consciousness, are no longer appropriate for our modern consciousness. They may even be harmful.

The witch’s eyes were red [and dim], and she could not see very far, but she had a keen scent, like the beasts. ...⁴

Translated into our language this means: the old magic consciousness is an instinctive consciousness. The spiritual is “sensed,” not apprehended as the result of clear-sighted and open-minded thinking. The red, short-sighted eyes of the witch are the dim counterpart of the crystal-clear ball, whose sparkling light finds its reflection in the mirror of truth on the mountain, in the tears of the grief-stricken princess, and in the well at the foot of the mountain, which is guarded and barred by the bull.⁵

Now the first sentences of the fairy tale gain meaning:

There was once an enchantress who had three sons who loved each other as brothers, but the old woman did not trust them, and thought they wanted to steal her power from her. So she changed the eldest into an eagle, which was forced to dwell in the rocky mountains ... The second, she changed into a whale, which lived in the deep sea. ... The third son, who was afraid she might change him into a raging wild beast, a bear perhaps, or a wolf, went secretly away.

When the fairy tale speaks of “three brothers” or “three sons,” it alludes to three fundamental human soul forces that sometimes work together and at other times work against each other. It has taken a long time to develop the free I-personality in individual human beings as well as in humanity at large. The sensitive, feeling human being is the eldest son and brother—the I in feeling.

Then the faculty of thinking evolved. The intelligently thinking human being is the second son and brother—the I in thinking. The consciously willing human being is the third and youngest son and brother—the I in willing.

With great caution we may suspect that during the course of oral tradition an error has crept in with regard to the sequence of the animal transformations.⁶ To restore this transformational scene to its proper significance the respective lines should read as follows:

... so she changed the eldest into a whale, which lived in the deep sea

Even though the fish in the water is regarded as an image for spiritual experience, it stands for experiences of a more emotional nature, “emerging out of the depths” of the soul, rather than for experiences of the high-altitude flight of keen perception. The water in this context is the element of the “surging rush of emotion” and of the dark unconscious.

The second, she changed into an eagle, which was forced to dwell in the rocky mountains [of the skull], and was often seen sweeping in great circles in the sky.

The image of the eagle usually signifies spirit in motion, spirit wind that elevates human thinking and supports it on its high-altitude flight providing thus the “overview” of “keen perception.” Consider this image in comparison with the Horus falcon at the back of the Egyptian pharaoh’s head, or think of the American Indian’s crown of feathers.

The third son, who was afraid she might change him into a raging wild beast [of the earth]... went secretly away.

After all, the power of will can be called human only if it has overcome the animal instincts, for example the fear instinct, the survival instinct, the herd instinct, etc.

The instinctive wild drives, symbolized in fairy tales by “wild animals,” are active in human beings, too, even in small children. However, if an individual strives to lead a life worthy of a human being, he must learn to be master of his instincts and transform them into I-conscious will. This is exactly what the fairy tale describes when the youngest brother escapes the danger of being dominated by his instincts, thanks to his intuitive wakefulness. Instead, he finds himself confronted with the wild animal at a later time. He struggles with it and finally kills it with the sword that was not his own at the beginning of his path. It is noteworthy in this connection that the bull fights practiced in earlier cultures,

e.g., those of the Persian Mithras Mysteries, were exercises to gain mastery and control over these instincts. I will come back to this subject in a later paragraph.

Well aware that development may lead to liberation, the witch is afraid of losing her position of power. Therefore, she tries to prevent the unfolding individuation of the I in feeling, thinking and willing, namely the three fundamental forces of the soul, which are united “in brotherly love.” She isolates thinking from feeling and banishes each of them into its extreme. If thinking is not complemented by the warming touch of feeling, the soul must suffer harm. The other extreme, pure emotion without the ordering activity of thinking, is just as tragic. Modern psychology describes this phenomenon as *split personality*. The witch misjudged the outcome of her manipulation. Her attempt to prevent the brothers’ development has quite the opposite effect: it initiates a process of true discrimination and self-realization. Like Mephistopheles in Goethe’s *Faust*, she is “a part of that force which would do evil evermore, and yet creates the good.”

The youngest soul force, the will, goes on his way with great determination:

By chance he came into a great forest, and did not know the way out of it. All at once he saw in the distance two giants ...

When the fairy tale has its hero wander through landscapes, enter a forest, climb a mountain, it never speaks of geographical locations but about transitional stages of changing soul realms. The forest is a world of proliferous vitality. Passions can easily erupt there in the shape of wild beasts or giants. It is usually dark in there and hardly ever does one know how one got in and even less how to get out. With other words, it is a world of harrying overabundance of wild forces of growth and, at the same time, a world of dark and dim semi-consciousness, even unconsciousness.

The giant is the embodiment of prehistoric, mythological man, Adam Kadmon, whose superhuman enormous figure and physical strength reach “from the earth up unto the stars.”⁷ He has a small head though, which means he lacks the faculties of alert, intellectual thinking and discernment.

The small men are cleverer than we are, so we will leave the decision to thee.

The hat covers the head. It represents the activity of thinking, brain-thinking, and in most fairy tales it is a key element for the course of action. *Red Riding Hood* is so fond of her little hood that she never takes it off. *Cinderella* asks her father, the merchant, to bring her as a gift the first hazel twig that strikes against his hat. *The Star Money* is the story of a homeless child who gives her hood to the child who is asking for it because his “head is so cold.”

As the hat keeps out the influx from above, so does one-sided head-thinking. By focusing on concepts and definitions, it establishes clear and one-sided barriers to the spiritual. A subconscious perception of this is mirrored in secular customs as well as in religious-cultic traditions. Consider, for instance, the respectful gesture of taking one's hat off in the presence of a king or God, in church, in meeting and greeting another person, or the gesture of covering the head as an expression of self-responsibility: "On my head be it."

In our story the giants quarrel about an old hat. The qualities of this hat are not known to the youngest son and when he makes use of its power he does so unconsciously. The old hat, the wishing-hat, represents the "old" thinking, the magical wish-thinking, which was able to overcome space and time but did not yet make use of the brain. It is a requisite of the old magic-maternal world of the giants, which as it is falling apart creates disunity and disharmony because the principle of the three, the principle of development, is alien to it. The quarrel of the two giants and the separation of the brothers are symbolic of this process.⁸ In naïve innocence the youngest brother continues on his way, following his *own* resolve to deliver the princess, forgetful of the world of the giants as he leaves them behind. Note that he is not flying but making use of his own feet.

He thought of the King's daughter, forgot the giants, and walked continually onward.

Although in our text the feet are not specifically mentioned, it is still worthwhile to direct our attention to the symbols of "foot" and "shoe" because implicitly the story talks about them: "... went secretly away" ... "and walked continually onward." On his feet and in his shoes the human being stands upon the earth. They are symbols of our connection with the earthly and hence with the tasks and possibilities of life. The one who is wearing only one shoe does no longer fully stand in life; the one who is wearing *shoes full of holes* has lost important faculties and is incompetent in life. *Worn-out shoes* indicate that a path has come to an end. *Chopped-off toes* signify an extremely materialistic path of life; *chopped-off heels* signify an escapist, dreamy attitude.⁹

If we want to discover our own humanity we need to rise, and wherever we rise we must also face the possibility of falling. The bigger and more impatient the expectation, the greater the illusion and disappointment. What bitter disappointment awaits our hero on entering the *Castle of the Golden Sun* up on the mountain! Highest expectations! Almost at the destination—and still so far from it!

Few fairy tales can rival the *Crystal Ball* in intensity, sophistication and intelligence. An almost overwhelming abundance of soul experiences, questions

and insights are concentrated in this short encounter with the spellbound princess, who is waiting for her redemption, and in the intimate conversation with her.

Above: in the empty castle, dwindled forces of life and stifled development.

However: in the midst of this grey and empty magic world, a spark of light: the crystal-clear, undisturbed mirror of truth and cognition.

...this is not my form; human eyes can only see me in this state of ugliness, but that thou mayst know what I am like, look in the mirror. It does not let itself be misled—it will show thee my image as it is in truth.

Below: by the spring: surging, always self-renewing forces of life.

However: kept in the dark, made inaccessible and guarded by the wild bull, the animal.

Above: bitter disappointment after a strenuous journey.

However: in spite of doubt and fear, determination and will for action, readiness for the spiritual leap from bitterness to the question:

How canst thou be set free? I fear no danger. ...Nothing can keep me from doing it, but tell me what I must do.¹⁰

Below: grave danger to life.

However: the first independent deed after being given a visionary answer.

With the death of the bull the soul drama is set in motion. Not only is the stream of vital energy set free and starts to surge anew, but the whole scenery becomes a spectacle of tremendous elemental turmoil.

As every birth is preceded by an experience of death, so also does the death of the bull act as a catalyst for a threefold birth of ever-new states of fire. Out of the fiery power of the bull the fiery bird is born. The light of the fiery bird in turn intensifies and transforms into the burning egg. Yet, only under tremendous pressure exerted by brother Eagle is the egg released from the bird's body. The fire catastrophe expected to follow upon the threefold fiery metamorphosis is prevented by the cooling waves of the sea churned up by brother Whale. At last, the undamaged crystal ball can be taken out of the broken shell.

Special attention is due to the image of the bull who guards the well. Out of his body the fiery bird is born and next to him stands the youngest brother with the sword in his hand. This image is a true reflection of one of the central initiation experiences of the ancient mysteries. The bull is the symbol of the forces of life and growth, the forces of renewal and fertility.

In ancient Egypt the sacred bull Apis was regarded as the tangible symbol of these forces. Later, during the Greek epoch, in Crete, the festival of “Jumping over the Bull” was celebrated. “Skilled young men confronted the bull, grabbed its horns and vaulted over its back.”¹¹

A later form of conquering the bull was practiced in the Persian Mithras Mysteries, whose central experience was the victory of the light over the darkness. Mithras, the son of the sun, conquers the bull by the well by sitting on his back and thrusting his sword into the back of its neck. Also, this is how the cultic cave paintings depict it. This image is not intended to glorify destruction as a form of self-gratification; instead, it points to the transformation of the dull forces of nature into the light of consciousness, which in our fairy tale is represented by the fiery bird. In the ancient mystery schools the phoenix was a symbol of instruction, the bird of thought, which, according to tradition, consumes itself by fire every five hundred years and rises anew from the ashes.

We encounter the phoenix again in Phoenicia, a country named after it. There it is described as having wings of gold or wings that shine in all the colors of the rainbow, and its nest is believed to spread a pleasant aroma of cinnamon. This cult was known throughout the world of antiquity. The conquering of the bull and the resurrection of the phoenix were parts of the central initiation experiences of antiquity. They represent what many centuries later reappears in the following words by Goethe as the ripe fruit of his genius:

And as long as you do not quest
For this “Die and bring to birth!”
You are but a somber guest
On the darkling earth.

The death of the bull and the rise of the phoenix are images that cast special light on one of the most interesting phenomena of the ancient world: the schools of initiation and their methods. The tremendous achievements of the spiritual elite of that time inspire us with great respect, and so we will describe with the greatest caution some aspects of the initiation proceedings as they are reflected in the fairy tale of the crystal ball. The mystery schools were the spiritual centers of antiquity and they were common throughout the world: *Heliopolis* and *Memphis* in Egypt; *Eleusis*, *Delphi*, *Ephesus* and *Samothrace* in Greece; the *Externsteine* in the Teutoburg forest in Germany; then *Chartres* in France, to name just a few of them.

Long before Christianity made its entry, Chartres was the center of Celtic druidism. Once a year all Druid priests would come together there to gather by the holy wells and in front of the portrait of the *Virgo Paritura*, the virgin

about to give birth. Like all initiates they were the teachers of a chosen group of young people. They taught the elite of their time, and from their vast experience and their profound understanding of nature, they gave instructions regarding seeding and harvesting. They also taught subjects such as geology, astronomy, philosophy and religion. After a period of about ten years the students were ready to leave the school and act as intermediaries between the center of teaching and the uninitiated—the common people. These bards, as they were called, travelled all over the western and northwestern Celtic region and presented the content of their mystery experiences in so-called didactic songs.

In this ancient bardic tradition, we find not only the origin of all European myths and fairy tales, but also the origin of the profession of the storyteller. The bard presented his fairy tales with modesty. Out of reverence for the content of the tales nothing was omitted or added to embellish the stories. Changes of text, omissions, abridged versions and modernizations began only within the last three hundred years, when the healthy intuition in regard to the quality of the original texts of the fairy tales became weaker and weaker and eventually threatened to become extinct.

We can say with certainty that old fairy tale images are not merely accidental images but symbols. They certainly did not come about as a result of random associations ... of a foggy folk-fantasy. Instead, these symbols are well-balanced and precise. ... An indication of this is the strictly objectified art form of the fairy tale as well as the fact that quite often images of mythological processes have been transformed and transposed into the form of the fairy tale.¹²

One can assume that the guiding impulses and principles for human life at that time, in particular all rules of physical and spiritual conduct, came from the mystery centers and the people who were trained by them. There we find the origin of our natural sciences, agriculture and medicine, of architecture, social sciences and religion. Influential personalities like *Heraclitus*, *Empedocles*, *Plato*, *Aristotle*, *Plutarch* and *Plotin*—they all were students of the mysteries. The mystery centers were the carriers and initiators of human culture for many thousands of years; nevertheless, for the world outside everything that went on in these schools was shrouded in mystery. The little knowledge we have about these schools has come down to us by way of cryptographic fragments of the wisdom that was strictly supervised and guarded by the mystery priests.

All those who were not satisfied with folk religion and its traditions searched for and found the teachers in the mysteries. These individuals would then withdraw completely from everyday life and submit their souls to a preparatory discipline of renunciation, including rituals of washing, wearing special garments and abstaining from certain types of meat. Under the guidance of twelve priestly assistants, the hierophant was guided from stage to stage and accompanied on his way toward ever deeper knowledge of himself. During a period of three and

a half days, he was lifted out of his physical body to such a degree that, although his bodily functions could still be maintained, in a deathlike sleep his soul went through trauma, fear and illusion. Through purposefully guided experiences of shock, for which the neophyte prepared for many years, the soul was led to the limits of its own capacity and beyond into the deeply individual experience of the immortal I. Since these extremely difficult inner experiences were contingent on the personal response of the particular individual to the purposefully guided traumatic experiences, the hierophant had to make a solemn promise of secrecy to guard against corruption by the uninitiated. Betrayal of the mysteries was forbidden on penalty of death.

Aeschylus, the famous Greek dramatist, is known to have been accused of betraying initiation secrets in his plays, but when he was summoned before court, he was able to prove that he had never been a student of the mysteries.

It was permitted to describe the student's central experience (here that of the Eleusinian Mysteries) in the following words:

I have come to the bounds of death and set foot on the threshold of Proserpine; I passed through all the elements and returned; at midnight I saw the sun shining in dazzling-white light; I saw the gods above and below from face to face and worshipped them at close range.¹⁴

Many other images that occur again and again in myths and fairy tales indicate that they depict initiation experiences: images of wandering, passing through fire, passing through ice, swimming in or through water (ocean or river), terrifying images of the drawn sword and of flowing blood. We also learn about the "homelessness" of the "son," about the "father" who abandons the son in a "boat." King and queen, bridegroom and bride, widow and children of the widow, hazelnut and oak tree, fish and bee—they are all symbols of different stages of the path of initiation. We learn about the desperate search of Gilgamesh, King of Uruk, for the "light of the sun" in the "dark mountain," of "twelve leagues," of threatening "animals," and ultimately we learn of death and overcoming it, after which the hierophant is allowed to come near to the god!¹⁵

During initiation the physical human being goes through death and gives birth to the spiritual, the divine being within. Among the numerous examples of initiation fairy tales, I would like to mention two that have special significance for further study: Grimms' *The King of the Golden Mountain* and *The King's Son Who Feared Nothing*.

Another wonderful description of an initiation experience can be found in the account given by the prophet Jonah of his experience "in the belly of the great fish."

For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me. Then I said, I am been cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple [my own innermost being]. The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God [who art thyself my innermost, concealed being]. When my soul fainted [when I set my soul free] within me, I remembered the Lord [the Lord of all worlds shone forth within me]: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple.¹⁶

And more than two thousand years after Jonah, the Persian-Arabic image of the phoenix bird was still alive and permeated the alchemy of that period:

Be pure of soul and dust become
That from your dust may shoot up grass.
Are you then hay, consume yourself
That from your embers light may glow.
And are you then mere burnt-up dust
Your ashes are the wise man's stone.¹⁷

The well-guarded secret of the alchemist method of producing a substance called the “philosopher’s stone” through a process of transmutation brings us back to our fairy tale of the crystal ball. As we look closely at the “birth processes” in the fairy tale we come to realize that they are accounts of true alchemist processes.

The emergence of the crystal ball bears a striking resemblance—even to the most fascinating details—to the natural formation of a diamond under the influence of atmospheric pressure, fire and water. A mineralogist will tell us that a natural diamond burns when exposed to high atmospheric pressure and temperatures of more than 8000° Celsius, provided that at the time of this extremely heated state it is also exposed to a strong current of oxygen, i.e., when it comes in contact with air that has a high concentration of oxygen.¹⁸

If we do not content ourselves with merely enjoying the poetic beauty and the symbolic diversity of this fairy tale but are prepared to receive some wondrous new tidings (the essence of what is “told” in the “tale”), then we must deepen our understanding of the image of the crystal ball. As it happens so often

when we try to understand a fairy tale image, language can put us on the right track. It speaks of “sharp” and “crystal-clear” thinking, a thinking that can injure with its sharpness but can also help to clarify something. The thinking implied here is the logical-intellectual thinking, which has a deadening effect when used exclusive of other soul forces, even in areas that cannot be illumined, analyzed and grasped by the intellect. This is implied in our fairy tale when it warns against the mineral’s potential forces of destruction.

... and if it fall on the ground [without the cooling effect of the water element], it will flame up and burn everything that is near.¹⁹ He who gets the crystal ball and holds it before the enchanter will destroy his power with it.

We have already come to know the magician’s power over the forces of life and growth, but what is the nature of the power of the crystal ball? What is its hidden secret? The secret of the crystal ball lies in the amalgamation of two extremes: the radial-crystalline and the spherical-globular. We will not find a single spherical crystal formation in inanimate nature; such a form is created by human hands only. Wherever a natural crystal does have a tendency toward the spherical, it always occurs at the price of losing its transparency, of losing the light. Wherever nature exhibits spherical formations, they come about through contact with the rounding action of water—and water is life!

Two forces are confronting each other: the life force of the crystal ball and the magic power over life—the force of living, “pure” thinking and the magic power of instinctive-magical consciousness.

The fairy tale of the crystal ball is an appeal to us to strive for a new thinking that has the potential to heal the distress experienced by human souls in our time. If this new thinking is contended for with fearless will—as shown in the fairy tale—it is able to join together what had been separated, to humanize what had been bestial, to give light to that which had been dark, breaking thus the magic resistance against renewal and growth.

Our ordinary thinking is passive thinking. Usually stimulated by sense perceptions, it is a projection of the outer world.²⁰ Most of the experiences carried about in our souls have been stimulated from outside. As a rule, our thinking is not active but re-active, initiated by desires, fears, calculations of profit and loss, but most of all determined by habit. By contrast, active thinking is original thinking, independent thinking, a spiritual act of creation accomplished by the strength and effort of our free human will, independent of the outer world of the senses.

Our fairy tale teaches us the first steps on the path toward stimulating this new creative thinking and thereby toward redeeming our human “royal” dignity.

1. Free yourself from any inappropriate claim of authority!
2. Be not afraid!
3. Do not attach more value to the “old hat” than is due to it today!
4. Do not see through “human eyes” only, but look into the mirror of truth!
5. Be not afraid to ask questions!
6. Be not afraid of unaccustomed answers!
7. Conquer the beast!

I am well aware that this attempt at interpreting the fairy tale *The Crystal Ball* is giving just one aspect of many. Additional aspects of the initiation rites, e.g., the so-called trials of fire, water and air, would show us quite different paths again; however, this would go beyond the scope of this article. Therefore, I have confined myself to the leading theme, the evolution of human thinking, which, although endangered by the one-sided training of the intellect, can be healed by imaginative pictorial thinking. In that sense the fairy tale of the crystal ball—in fact every fairy tale—is message and exercise at the same time.

References:

1. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), German poet.
2. Plotinus (205-270 AD), Greek philosopher, who founded Neoplatonism.
3. Friedl Lenz, *Bildsprache der Märchen*.
4. Grimms' *Complete Fairy Tales*, “Hansel and Gretel.”
5. The Hebrew word *ajin* means *eye*, but it also stands for *mirror* and *well*.
6. Friedl Lenz, *Bildsprache der Märchen*.
7. *The Legends of the Jews*.
8. The relationship between *magic* and *mother* has its etymological origin in the Sanskrit root *mah*: *mater*; *mater magna* as the expression for the earth, Mother Earth. *Magic*: control over the force of life. Maya: the goddess of the force of life (also called Majesta) and the goddess of the month of May, the month of the burgeoning vitality of Spring.
9. Compare the two stepdaughters in the fairy tale “Cinderella.”
10. Medieval Parzival fails to ask the ailing King Anfortas the redeeming question and is therefore considerably set back on his path of development, while the King is condemned to further suffering.
11. Ortrud Stumpfe, *Die Symbolsprache der Märchen*.
12. Ibid.
13. Rudolf Steiner, *Christianity as Mystical Fact* (GA 8).
14. Lucius Apuleius (c. 125–200 AD), Roman philosopher and writer.
15. It is interesting to note that the Gilgamesh epic tells about an unsuccessful initiation.
16. *Bible* (King James Version), Jonah 2: 3–7.
17. Feerid-eddin-Attar (1216–1313) Persian Sufi.
18. Rudolf Geiger, *Märchenkunde*.
19. The fairy tale has created a number of other images to express the nature of the intellect.
20. • The activity of the tailor with needle and scissors is a fitting image for an intellectual attitude. He strikes at wholeness, cuts it into pieces and puts them together again at his own discretion. His *modus operandi* is analysis and synthesis.

- The woodcutter personifies the abstract theoretician, who analyses and splits concepts, losing sight of the living whole.
- The coldness of the intellect is well-expressed in the image of “the grave of the rich man’s wife, which is covered with snow.”

*Several attempts to contact Christianne Brown have failed. I would appreciate an up-to-date e-mail address from anyone who knows her. – Ed.

Grimm Fairy Tale #197

The Crystal Ball

Once upon a time there was a sorceress who had three sons, and they loved each other dearly. But the old woman did not trust them and thought they wanted to steal her power. So she changed the oldest son into a eagle. He had to make his home in the mountain cliffs, and sometimes he could be seen gliding up and down in the sky and making circles. The second son was changed into a whale that lived deep in the ocean, and one could see him only when he sometimes sent mighty jets of water high into the air. Both sons reverted to their human shape for just two hours every day. Since the third son feared that his mother might change him also, this time into a wild animal, perhaps a bear or a wolf, he sneaked away in secret.

Indeed, he had heard that at the castle of the golden sun there was an enchanted princess who was waiting to be rescued. However, one would have to risk one’s life. Twenty-tree young men had already suffered a miserable death, and only one more would be allowed to try to rescue her. After that nobody would be permitted to come. Since he had a courageous heart, he decided to search fo the castle of the golden sun.

He had already traveled a long time and had not been able to find it, when he got lost in a large forest and could not find his way out. Suddenly he noticed two giants in the distance, who waved to him with their hands, and as he approached them they said, “We’re quarreling over this hat and who should get it. Since we’re each just as strong as the other, neither one can defeat the other. Now, small people are smarter than we are, so we want you to make the decision.”

“How can you quarrel over an old hat?” the young man asked.

“You don’t know the powers it has. It’s a wishing hat. Whoever puts it on can wish himself to be anywhere he wants, and within seconds he’ll be there.”

“Give me the hat,” the young man said. “I’ll go off some distance from here, and when I call you, run to me, and whoever wins the race will get the hat.” He put the hat on his head and went off. However, he thought about the king’s daughter, forgot the giants, and kept going. Once he sighed with all his heart and cried out, “Oh, if only I were at the castle of the golden sun!” And no sooner had he uttered these words than he was standing on top of a high mountain in front of the castle gate.

He entered the castle and strode through all the rooms until he reached the last one, where he found the king's daughter. However, he was horrified when he saw her: Her face was ash gray and full of wrinkles, and she had dreary eyes and red hair. "Are you the king's daughter whose beauty is praised by the entire world?" he exclaimed.

"Ah," she replied, "this is not my real condition. Human eyes can see me only in this ugly form. But look into this mirror so you'll know what I look like. The mirror can't be fooled, and it will show you my image as it truly is."

She handed him the mirror, and he saw the reflection of the most beautiful maiden in the world, and he saw tears rolling down her cheeks out of sadness. Then he said, "How can you be saved? I'm afraid of nothing."

She replied, "Whoever gets the crystal ball and holds it in front of the magician will break his power, and I'll return to my true form. But," she added, "many a man has gone to his death because of this, and you, my young thing, I'd feel sorry if you placed yourself in such great danger."

"Nothing can stop me," he said. "But tell me what I must do."

"I want you to know everything," the king's daughter answered. "When you descend the mountain on which the castle stands, there'll be a wild bison at the bottom next to the spring. You will have to fight it. And, if you should be so fortunate as to slay this beast, a firebird will rise from it. This bird carries a glimmering egg in its body, and the egg has a crystal ball as a yolk. However, the bird will not let go of the egg unless it is forced to. And, if the egg falls onto the ground, it will set everything on fire and destroy everything near it. The egg itself will melt along with the crystal ball, and all your efforts will have been in vain."

The young man descended the mountain and reached the spring, where the bison snorted and roared at him. After a long battle the young man pierced the bison's body with his sword, and the beast sank to the ground. The firebird immediately rose from the bison and tried to fly away, but the eagle, the brother of the young man, who flew through the clouds, dived after the bird and chased it toward the ocean.

There the eagle hit the bird so hard with its beak that the bird was forced to let the egg fall. However, it did not fall into the ocean but on top of a fisherman's hut standing on the shore, and the hut began to smoke right away and was about to burst into flames. Then waves as large as houses rose up in the ocean, swept over the hut, and vanquished the flames. The second brother, the whale, had swum toward the shore and driven the water onto the land.

When the fire was out, the young man searched for the egg and was fortunate enough to find it. It had not melted yet, but the shell had cracked open due to the sudden cooling from the water, and he could take out the crystal ball, which was undamaged.

When the young man went to the magician and held the ball in front of him, the magician said, "My power is destroyed. From now on you are king of the castle of the golden sun. You can also restore your brothers to their human form."

So the young man hurried back to the king's daughter, and as he entered her room she stood there in all her magnificent beauty, and they exchanged rings with each other in a joyful celebration.