

Personal Experience in relation to the meaning of Fairy Tales

Hansel & Gretel (Babes in the Wood)

I was born during the 2nd World War and I think I absorbed a belief that, whilst the world outside can be dangerous you are not even safe in your home. This was tempered by 'look on the bright side' and "every cloud has a silver lining" amongst many other sayings both negative and positive, such as 'beauty is only skin deep'.

My mother spent 6 months in a sanatorium, being treated for TB, when I was around 2 years old. We lived with my Nan but she worked and couldn't take care of me so my father took me with him to live with his mother. I therefore temporarily 'lost' the two women I loved most. I had friends at infant school who lost parents. The mother of one died from TB and the father of another was killed in the war.

I was an only child (until I was nearly 19), so spent a lot of time in my own company and loved books and stories. My early heroines, after *Milly Molly Mandy*, were Jo in *Little Women* and Katy, in *What Katy Did*. Jo and Katy were girls who wanted to be what they wanted to be and not what someone else wanted them to be. I was considered to be a tomboy and always wished I had an older brother so that we could have adventures together and he would look after me.

Fairy tales as reinforcement or not of the female role

I never had any sense of women being weak and passive, rather of a contradiction that, whilst they might appear to be soft and dependent, they actually 'ruled the roost' – at least so far as my extended family were concerned. Unusually for the times, my mother worked and my father was a good, plain cook and quite domesticated. I therefore already had a kind of model for a relationship where male/female roles were less defined which I brought with me into my marriage.

In one of my father's letters to me, from when he was in the army in Egypt, he wrote "I send you my love and mummy writes that you ask where it is. Well Catherine, one day, when you are a beautiful young woman, you will meet someone and then you'll know what love is". I therefore always expected that I would find a Prince Charming. I just didn't realise that you have to work so hard for the 'Happy ever After'!

My parents were quite broad-minded, especially at the times and also enjoyed bawdy humour. Even so, when I started my periods I was told that I was grown-up now but I must be very careful with boys. There was a lot of emphasis upon 'saving oneself'.

Germaine Greer's book, "The Female Eunuch" made everything clear to me regarding women's roles and created dependency, although I never thought it applied too much to me!

Clarissa Pinkola Estes' book helped to put me back in touch with my creative self. I believe in the power of dreams and creative visualization to access parts of consciousness which we might often repress. You just have to read the symbols.

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