

ETHICS AND AESTHETICS IN THE FAIRY TALES

The fairy tales were, not a long time ago, subjected to violent criticism and accused to let the child live in an abstract and unreal world from which he would not be able to free himself in order to accept hard reality. Narrating fairy tales was therefore considered as a negative practice that made traditional grandparents feel guilty and was also seen by modernist parents as a crusade against it in order to prepare their children for the impact with real life.

That period of time did not luckily last too long (although it caused some damages...), and today we are more or less sure of the benefit of the fairy tales for the correct upbringing of a child. A big contribution should be recognized to Bruno Bettelheim, who faced the challenge with his broad outlook and a clear point of view, both historic-cultural and sociopsychological: his book "The Uses of Enchantment" has become an essential historical landmark which everyone should refer to.

I belong to that generation which was told fairy tales as a merely educational method, therefore Perrault's softened versions, and with a moral end (a very boring one since I remember...) were the most narrated. Grimm's ones instead, were carefully selected as they often seemed to be too "rough" in the eyes of some sensitive pedagogues that did not want to shock their young addressees.

And yet, we all know well that the brothers Grimm had spent their time to gather and file with care all those fairy tales told by the folk's living memory. They did not ask themselves whether the fairy tales were striking or not and to what extent, they were mostly interested in filing the exact words that spoke to many generations without causing any trauma. Perhaps, they did not even consider such a danger, as they were so absorbed by the archaeological frenzy. They only desired to preserve a certain cultural heritage that was about to disappear.

Anyway, the bigger "authenticity" of the brothers Grimms' fairy tales in comparison to Perrault's ones is a fact. Perrault aimed to soften, polish and sweeten everything he was writing, keeping in mind who his addressees were – the good maidens at the court who could not for sure get upset by too realistic details. So if we want to reach the core of a fairy tale, we should mainly examine the brothers Grimm's ones that were created by tradition and therefore they are the straightforward expression of the folk's morality and mentality, of the community as a bearer of values that had generally been accepted since ages.

If we want to evaluate these texts through a psychosynthetic approach, we can easily notice that those parts of the stories that are offhandedly defined "too rough, too striking", are indeed the most useful for the child:

the young listener's scared face is not due to the fact that the wolf devours the Little Redhood or because of the witch that casts evil spells; it is not because he is afraid that something similar can happen to him too (although very young and full of imagination, he knows very well that neither wolves go around on our streets, nor witches are inhabitants of our modern world). It is his vague awareness that these characters are the personification of powers that he "actually" knows well as they stir in his subconscious. The child knows that there are impulses inside of him that the surrounding world will not appreciate and will not even want to see them being expressed. For this reason, the child cannot do anything else but suppress them and act as if they do not exist. But they do. They make him feel uncomfortable. He feels guilty for perceiving their existence. Feeling their existence, instead, should help him get to know them while transferring them to a witch character or to any other evil creature and a negative character. At the moment when the child sees that a negative impulse gets punished, he understands that it is logical and "right". Doing so, he has managed to live in different circumstances, as a different character, as if it was his own behaviour and fulfilment of his actions but he himself issues the sentence that brings to punishment and all other consequences. He has seen in the narrative how negative these actions are and he has rejected them without any judges' external condemnation that can teach him which way of behaving is the right one. The child is not silly at all but he has not any experience yet. He is also weak as he is not given the tools that only the flow of time can deliver. Therefore he needs a soft approach to enter his intimate world. So if he needs to explore the "basements" of his soul and tidy them up, the best way to do it is with a fairy tale that spares him the fear to face the chaos inside of him, as he has not any defence tools yet.

Recalling my personal experience, I should recognize that my generation was offered the forced preference of Walt Disney's cartoons upon the brothers' Grimm's stories. They were so captivating and overpowering, and influenced the narrator's search of inspiration in the modern film than in the traditional fairy tales. This deviation from tradition could be seen as a negative one if we consider the fairy tale as a container of important values

and, let us say, as a little support that is useful for the child's development and his ability to afford every emerging problem. Yes, I have mentioned that before.

Even the good Disney and his collaborators did not get free from the so called Volksgeist that permanently lives in our subconscious. They could not disregard some details that were inescapable facts for an aware fairy-tale creator but perhaps not for them.

Now I am approaching our main topic which is the relationship between ethics and aesthetics.

It is well known since ancient times that the idea of kalòs kài agathòs was considered indisputable: the physical beauty was the outer expression of an inner balance, therefore the quote "beautiful and good" is regularly used in our fairy tales together with its opposition "ugly and bad". The only change since classical age is the loss of social connotation of a certain social class that was given the right to govern. Now it has been extended to the concept of "kind-heartedness" that is the only quality for being respected and esteemed. One step toward democracy, in other words.

Back to Disney's characters: we can see how beauty is in fact "good people"'s privilege, the positive models', the ones that the child can refer to and be confident with, he can/must imitate – Snow White, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty are all beautiful and, although male characters are often recognizable by other qualities, such as courage and smartness, they never seem to have a nasty appearance. On the other side, evil is always personified by ugly and bad protagonists – the sisters-in-law, the witch, the Monster etc. I suddenly remember of having chanced upon a "Cinderella" sequel in which one of the sisters-in-law, after some usual cruelty, has started sympathising, as a result her facial features get sweetened and, her ugliness stops being the reflection of the evil inside her.

Up to here, coherence is entirely evident: beautiful=good, ugly=bad. However, there are some exceptions that diverge from this symmetry and are necessary for the children to understand that things are not only black or white. First of all, let us recall the mothers-in-law, and especially the Snow White's: she is a very beautiful woman from the very beginning and the king is misled by her beauty and marries her. "When" does the queen's re-

al nature emerge? The moment she decides to leave the direct confrontation with Snow White, she starts using witchcraft. Ordering the hunter to kill Snow White is indeed an evil agency but completely evident and it is not hidden behind deceptive behaviour. Her decision to use magic combs, poisoned apples and other objects, shows that she does not aim at a head-on collision but she resorts instead to sly witchcraft. At this point the queen cannot hide any more behind her beautiful appearance and social superiority, and turns into an old witch.

Also in "The Sleeping Beauty" the witch Maleficent turns into a dragon to fight against prince Phillip that goes to awake princess Aurora from her deep sleep. Similarly Pinocchio is about to face reality once he has arrived to the Pleasure Island – he is about to see how the charioteer's benevolent face turns into the devilish one, of a jailer, and his friend Lucignolo is turned into a donkey, he starts his metamorphosis with donkey ears and a tail...

Cinderella's metamorphosis is of a different kind: it is true that she is newly dressed from top to toe but the real transformation can be seen in her animal friends – the horse and the dog, which have always been considered closer to human nature and human sensibility, are "promoted" and turned into human beings, namely into a charioteer and a lackey; the pumpkin which is on the very last level of importance remains an object but a highly equipped one – the chariot. And the quick and lively mice get ennobled to horses. It is not a coincidence that all these protagonists are animals: although Cinderella is protected by the mother figure of a female deity that is also her fairy godmother with broad power ability, Cinderella needs to gather her own power too, even the irrational and "primitive" one in order to overcome her difficulties.

What we are also interested in, is the different outcome of all the metamorphosis: the moment Cinderella forgets about her fairy godmother's warning and irrationally abandons herself to the dance, everything vanishes because beauty can only exist through moral balance and the awareness of what is happening to us should never lack. By picking up her small shoe and showing it to the prince afterwards, she regains her attention and her mental alertness that save her from an uncertain situation.

What about the princess Aurora? Alas, the feminist readers should resign themselves to the fact: our protagonist is not able to act. She falls in a deep sleep from which only the prince's prompt action can awake, she cannot do anything by herself. She follows Maleficent's tempting music, she is too curious to avoid the unknown sharp object without touching it, in other words she cannot control her irrational impulses and that is why she falls at a low ebb by falling asleep without willing to awake. Si licet parva componere magnis, it comes to my mind Dante walking in the woods when he manages to survive by following Virgil because he suddenly awakes from his sleepwalking that has led him into the woods:

“I cannot well repeat how there I entered,/ So full was I of slumber at the moment/ In which I had abandoned the true way.”

Also Snow White is not able to protect herself, nothing helps her, not even her intuition, neither her primitive sensations (the dwarfs are not physically developed, they are rather unshaped sketches, and the forest animals appear to have primitive sensibility and rationality. Therefore, she is easily hunted by the witch and follows her irrational impulses (accepts the poisoned comb due to her vanity, she is greedy for the apple and she naïvely believes that the fruit can fulfil a wish. As a consequence, she gets choked and falls in the sleep of reason. The prince is the only one who can save her, he is the personification (also in other contexts) of reality, of Love, also physical one, that helps the child become an adult and approach life in all aspects, also material. Making mistakes and bad experiences plus being helped by a strong and mindful character, someone that has already successfully afforded danger and risks, can help our female protagonist to overcome her fear and thus the negative situation she is in.

I will not keep my attention on the division of roles, male and female, active and passive because it will lead us too far into a rather sociological matter than a psychosyntetical one.

And the two witches? Where did they end up? Both fell down from a cliff and died – an explicit metaphor for our irrational hell-like subconscious where one ends up if s/he pays too much attention to his/her evil impulses and forgets that s/he should aim at an ethical purpose. In addition, the witches died as prisoners, one is still a witch, the other is a dragon as they are not able to recover back to the superior self of human nature. They had consciously abdicated a time ago to pursue their aims that are not ethical at all, and therefore they are characterized by ugliness.

Something different happened to Pinocchio that appeared a dumb until almost the end of the story but then he unexpectedly discovers his ethical spirit which is so elevated that he is even ready to sacrifice his own life to save others. There is a tension that can be defined as transpersonal: at that very moment the regression has become possible because of ethics that is so strongly ex-

pressed to make deformity disappear, and the wooden puppet transforms into a child, a real human being, re-born for a new life.

Also the witches have lost the connection with their human Selves, they are definitely denied any redemption, they will not be able to find the way back as they are forever stuck to an inferior state that they have chosen by themselves. Whereas, Pinocchio has rescued himself on time, he is given a way, though a narrow and a difficult one, to follow by paying a big price. The character Talking Cricket (that sometimes appears annoying, conceited and gossipy) has saved Pinocchio at the moment of his metamorphosis by preserving him from losing his humanity. The agency of Logos can sometimes appear *ab externo*, even a little tutorial but necessary at the moment in which there is no other way out. Act of force is what we need to pull ourselves back from the collapse we are headed to. From this point of view the Talking Cricket gains his undeniable importance.

Deformity is also present in the fairy tale “Beauty and the Beast” but it is not due to reproachable behaviour, instead it is the result of an external curse. This external curse is common in other fairy tales too, such as “The Swan Prince” and “Brother and Sister”, and in all others where a witch or a magician has cast an evil spell that is not always the punishment for a wrong action. It is often done as a revenge that is too cruel. The protagonist suffers of the dissonance between his/her “good” nature and his/her “nasty” appearance, as if s/he is a prisoner in a cage from which s/he wants to escape. The only solution for the protagonist is the transpersonal agency of someone who believes in him/her in spite of his/her nasty appearance, someone who is able to feel spiritual love for him/her without being repelled by unpleasant appearance. But the real key for a change and salvation is the protagonist’s determination to preserve his/her good nature, and doing so he manages to “overcome” his/her nasty appearance and gets identified by his/her real ethical self, by someone who can love and help him/her. Even when the ethical values seem to be completely buried under a repelling body, the protagonist’s perseverance not to give up under the negative influence but to keep on cultivating his good sensitivity is the only way out of the ethical tragedy.

Even though “The Beauty and the Beast” is not one of the brothers Grimm’s fairy tales but a French storyteller’s who lived in the 700’s, and it was also adjusted a couple of times, it is still important for our topic because it represents the victory of the transpersonal relation that can go beyond appearance and leads to the protagonists’ better fulfilment. If the Beast is the representation of a rough nature while the Beauty is the representation of a refined psychic behaviour, their union shows how only through the transpersonal relation, the individual fulfilment is born. The Self has achieved completeness.

It can also be noticed that external beauty and internal one have been recently highlighted in order to make the reader aware of the fact that they are not always inter-related: some authors, such as Andersen, Oscar Wilde and others, displayed in their works characters which hide behind their ugly appearance, a powerful and loving spirit. I am inclined to state that this is an attempt to influence society and the small readers’ “growing” spirit, to instil in them the perceiving of the neighbour outside the rigid and schematic definition originated in the Enlightenment period that was so regrettably “mathematical” and so lacking of emotional concession of the soul. I am entirely convinced that the Enlightenment was a rather negative period for the society, during which the human part of the transpersonal relation was almost destroyed, because it was “catalogued” as irrational, and humans were nearly reduced to pure machines, unable of feelings. Although the attempt did not succeed on the whole, it has left some traces of prejudice which we still have to deal with. The evidence is the persistence of expressions and stereotypes which we, to some extent, still believe in: “Be rational!” “Don’t make your feelings overwhelm you!”, “Use your brain, not your heart!” and so on, as if the heart is a negative part of us, that we should suppress and never listen to, because it can be misleading.

It is useless to linger on the well known “Ugly Duckling” but also the famous fairy tale “The Little Mermaid” has the same background: in both cases the protagonists want to pursue happiness in a world to which they do not belong, they want to challenge nature and get freed from those affinity rules that restrict the achievement of affection. Beauty is there but ethics should be the out-

come of their “correct” choices. To be a part of a world they do not belong to, to change their own self, can bring them to harm or even annihilation. This danger was also present in the fairy tales from the classical period – from the frog that wanted to be as big as an ox to the raven that dressed himself up with a peacock tail. But the real feature of the Greek-Roman tradition was the inclination to state the obvious, to criticize evidence and sentence morality. In modern fairy tales more attention is paid to the implicit presentation of the concept, so that the listener believes that he personally develops the story and extracts what is useful for him, both at the moment of listening and in further future elaborations.

As an outcome, there is the realization that removing the fairy tales from the child’s educational world is an aggressive action (although with good intentions) to his correct psychological development in order to deal with himself and his own subconscious. He finds himself at the point of denying the existence of such an important aspect of his own soul. The consequences of this dichotomy can be seen in the everyday life – the unity of the Self gets denied and the recovery of one’s own integrity cannot be easily achieved.

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AN INTELLIGENT AND CARING MIND

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(ABSTRACT)

In the present article is favored the eastern conception of mind, in particular the traditional Indian thought, for which manas (a sort of interface between ‘personal’ and ‘transpersonal’) expresses the totality of heart, intellect and spirit.

It is defined intelligent and caring that mind which goes in line with herself taking account of the other, mainly of his emotions and feelings.

Among the possible characteristics that qualify intelligence are numbered: the awareness of his own conditioning, exterior and interior; the courage to express his own thoughts, to seek and experience, the creativity, understood as original creation but also as capacity of adaptation; the curiosity, as capacity of integral observation; the deductive approach to problems (from overview proceeds to the particular); the maieutics (the Socratic art of helping to give birth to their ideas, point of views and motivations); the intuitive abilities, or superconceptuals and supersensorial, of synthesis (knowing how to put harmonic interaction in separate parts, such as it is typical, but not exclusive, of live and