

Andrea Dworkin, *The Fairy Tales*, 1974.



1.

You cannot be free if you are contained within a fiction
Julian Beck, *The Life of Theatre*

Once upon a time there was a wicked with and her name was

Lilith
Eve
Hagar
Jezebel
Delilah
Pandora
Jahi
Tamar

And there was a wicked with and she was also called goddess and her name was

Kali
Fatima
Artemis
Hera
Isis
Mary
Ishtar

And there was a wicked with and she was also called queen and her name was

Bathsheba

Vashti
Cleopatra
Helen
Salome
Elizabeth
Clytemnestra
Medea

And there was a wicked witch and she was also called witch and her name was

Joan
Circe
Morgan le Fay
Tiamat
Maria Leonza
Medusa

And they had this in common: that they were feared, hated, desired and worshipped.

When one enters the world of fairy tales one seeks with difficulty for the actual place where legend and history part. One wants to locate the precise moment when fiction penetrates into the psyche as reality, and history begins to mirror it. Or vice versa. Women live if fairy tale as magical figures, as beauty, danger, innocence, malice and greed. On the personae of the fairy tale - the wicked witch, the beautiful princess, the heroic prince - we find what the culture would have us know about who we are.

The point is that we have not formed that ancient world - it has formed us. We ingested it as children whole, had its values and consciousness imprinted on our minds as cultural absolutes long before we were in fact men and women. We have taken the fairy tales of childhood with us into maturity, chewed but still lying in the stomach, as real identity. Between Snow White and her heroic prince, our two great fictions, we never did have much of a chance. At some point, the Great Divide took place: they (the boys) dreamed of mounting the Great Steed and buying Snow White from the dwarfs; we (the girls) aspired to become that object of every necrophiliac's lust - the innocent, *victimized*, Sleeping-Beauty, beauteous lump of ultimate, sleeping good. Despite ourselves, sometimes unknowingly, sometimes knowing, unwilling, unable to do otherwise, we act out the roles we were taught.

Here is the beginning, where we learn who we must be, as well as the moral of the story.

1. Once upon a time: The Roles

Death is that remedy all singers dream of
Allen Ginsberg

The culture predetermines who we are, how we behave, what we are willing to know, what we are able to feel.

We are born into a sex role which is determined by visible sex, or gender.

We follow explicit scenarios of passage from birth into youth into maturity into old age, and then we die.

In the process of adhering to sex roles, as a direct consequence of the imperatives of those roles, we commit homicide, suicide and genocide.

Death is our only remedy. We imagine heaven. There is no suffering there, we say. There is no sex there, we say. We mean, there is no culture there. We mean, there is no gender there. We dream that death will release us from suffering - from guilt, sex, the body. We recognize the body as the source of our suffering. We dream of a death that will mean freedom from it because here on earth, in our bodies, we are fragmented, anguished - either men or women, bound by the very fact of a particularized body to a role which is annihilating, totalitarian, which forbids us any real self-becoming or self-realization.

Fairy tales are the primary information of the culture. They delineate the roles, interactions and values which are available to us. They are our childhood models, and their fearful, dreadful content terrorizes us into submission - if we do not become good, then evil will destroy us; if we do not achieve the happy ending, then we will drown in the chaos. As we grow up, we forget the terror - the wicked witches and their smothering malice. We remember romantic paradigms: the heroic prince kisses Sleeping Beauty; the heroic prince searches his kingdom for Cinderella; the heroic prince marries Snow White. But the terror remains as the substratum of male-female relation - the terror remains, and we do not ever recover from it or cease to be motivated by it. Grown men are terrified of the wicked witch, internalized in the deepest parts of memory. Women are no less terrified, for we know that not to be passive, innocent and helpless is to be actively evil.

Terror, then, is our real theme.

The mother as figure of terror

Whether "instinctive" or not, the maternal role in the sexual constitution originates in the fact that only the woman is necessarily present at birth. Only the woman has a dependable and easily identifiable connection to the child - a tie on which society can rely. This maternal feeling is the root of human community.

George Gilder Sexual Suicide.

Snow White's biological mother was a passive, good queen who sat at her window and did embroidery. She pricked her finger one day - no doubt an event in her life - and 3 drops of blood fell from it onto the snow. Somehow that led her to wish for a child "as white as the snow; as red as blood, and as black as the wood of the embroidery frame." Soon after, she had a daughter with "skin as white as snow, lips as red as blood, and hair as black as ebony." Then, she died.

A year later the king married again. His new wife was beautiful, greedy, and proud. She was, in fact, ambitious and recognized that beauty was coin in the male realm, that beauty translated directly into power because it meant male admiration, male alliance, male devotion.

The new queen had a magic mirror and she would ask it" "Looking glass upon the wall, Who

is fairest of us all?" And, inevitably, the queen was the fairest (had there been anyone fairer, we can presume the king would have married her).

One day the queen asked her mirror who the fairest was and the mirror answered: "Queen, you are full fair, 'tis true, but Snow White fairer is than you." Snow White was seven years old.

The queen became "yellow and green with envy and from that hour her heart turned against Snow White, and she hated her. And envy and pride like ill weeds grew in her heart higher every day, until she had no peace..."

Now, we all know what nations will do to achieve peace, and the queen was no less resourceful (she would have made an excellent head of state). She ordered a huntsman to take Snow White to the forest, kill her, and bring back her heart. The huntsman, an uninspired good guy, could not kill the sweet young thing, so he turned her loose in the forest, killed a boar, and took its heart back to the queen. The heart was "salted and cooked, and the wicked woman ate it up, thinking that there was an end of Snow White."

Snow White found her way to the home of the 7 dwarfs, who told her that she could stay with them "if you will keep our house for us, and cook, and wash, and make the beds, and sew and knit, and keep everything tidy and clean." They simply adored her.

The queen, who can now be called with conviction the *wicked* queen, found out from her mirror that Snow White was still alive and fairer than she. She tried several times to kill Snow White, who fell into numerous deep sleeps but never quite died. Finally, the wicked queen made a poisoned apple and induced the ever-vigilant Snow White to bit into it. Snow White did die, or became more dead than usual, because the wicked queen's mirror then verified that she was the fairest in the land.

The dwarfs, who loved Snow White, could not bear to bury her under the ground, so they enclosed her in a glass coffin and put the coffin on a mountaintop. The heroic prince was just passing that way, immediately fell in love with Snow-white-under-glass and bought her (it?) from the dwarfs who loved her (it?). As servants carried the coffin along behind the prince's horse, the piece of poisoned apple that Snow White had swallowed "flew out of her throat." She soon revived fully, that is to say, not much. The prince placed her squarely in the "it" category, and marriage in its proper perspective, too, when he proposed wedded bliss -- "I would rather have you than anything in the world." The wicked queen was invited to the wedding, which she attended because the mirror told her that the bride was fairer than she. At the wedding "they had ready red-hot iron shoes in which she had to dance until she fell down dead."

Cinderella's mother-situation was the same. Her biological mother was good, pious, passive and soon dead. Her step-mother was greedy, ambitious and ruthless. Her ambition dictated that her own daughters make good marriages. Cinderella meanwhile, was forced to do heavy domestic work, and when her work was done her stepmother would throw lentils into the ashes and make Cinderella separate the lentils from the ashes. The stepmother's malice toward Cinderella was not free-floating and irrational. On the contrary, her own social validation was contingent on the marriages she made for her own daughters. Cinderella was a real threat to her. Like Snow White's stepmother, for whom beauty was power and to be the most beautiful was to be the most powerful, Cinderella's stepmother knew how the social structure operated,

and she was determined to succeed on its terms.

Cinderella's stepmother was presumably motivated by maternal love for her own biological offspring. Maternal love is known to be transcendent, holy, noble and unselfish. It is coincidentally also a fundament of human (male-dominated) civilization and it is the real basis of human (male-dominated) sexuality:

When the prince began to search for the woman whose foot would fit the golden slipper, the two sisters were very glad, because they had pretty feet. The eldest went to her room to try on the shoe, and her mother stood by. But she could not get her great toe into it, for the shoe was too small; her mother handed her a knife, and said:

"Cut off the toe, for when you are queen you will never have to go on foot." So the girl cut her toe off and squeezed her foot into the shoe, concealed the pain, and went down to the prince. Then he took her with him on his horse as his bride...

Then the prince looked at her shoe, and saw the blood flowing. And he turned his horse round and took the false bride home again, saying that she was not the right one, and that the other sister must try on the shoe. So she went into her room to do so, and got her toes comfortably in, but her heel was too large. Then her mother handed her the knife saying "Cut a piece off your heel; when you are queen you will never have to go on foot."

So the girl cut off a piece of her heel, and thrust her foot into the shoe, concealed the pain, and went down to the prince, who took his bride....

Then the prince looked at her foot, and saw how the blood was flowing...

Cinderella's stepmother understood correctly that her only real work in life was to marry off her daughters. Her goal was upward mobility, and her ruthlessness was consonant with the values of the market place.* She loved her daughters the way Nixon loves the freedom of the Indochinese, and with much the same result. Love in a male-dominated society certainly is a many-splendored thing.

*This depiction of woman as flesh on an open market, or crippling and mutilation for the sake of a making a good marriage is not fiction. cf chapter 6 Gynocide: Chinese footbinding.

Rapunzel's mother wasn't exactly a winner either. She had a maternal instinct all right - she had "long wished for a child, but in vain." Sometime during her wishing, she developed a craving for rampion, a vegetable which grew in the garden of her neighbor and peer, the witch. She persuaded her husband to steal rampion from the witch's garden, and each day she craved more. When the witch discovered the theft, she made this offer

...you may have as much rampion as you like, on one condition 0 the child that will come into the world must be given to me. It shall go well with the child, and I will care for it like a mother."

Mama didn't think twice - she traded. Rapunzel for a vegetable. Rapunzel's surrogate mother, the witch, did not do much better by her:

When she was twelve years old the witch shut her up in a tower in the midst of a wood, and it had neither steps nor door, only a small window above. When the witch wished to be let in, she would stand below and cry, "Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair!"

The heroic prince, having finished with Snow White and Cinderella, now happened upon Rapunzel. When the witch discovered the liaison, she beat up Rapunzel, cut off her hair, and cloistered her "in a waste and desert place, where she lived in great woe and misery."

The witch then confronted the prince, who fell from the tower and blinded himself on thorns. (He recovered when he found Rapunzel, and they lived happily ever after.)

Hansel and Gretel had a mother, too. She simply abandoned them:

I will tell you what, husband... we will take the children early in the morning into the forest where it is thickest; we will make them a fire, and we will give each a piece of bread, then we will go to our work and leave them alone; they will never find the way home again, and we shall be quit of them"

Hungry, lost, frightened, the children find a candy house which belongs to an old lady who is kind to them, feeds them, houses them. She greets them as her children, and proves her maternal commitment by preparing to cannibalize them.

These fairy tale mothers are mythological female figures. They define for us the female character and delineate its existential possibilities. When she is good, she is soon dead. In fact, when she is good, she is so passive in life that death must be only more of the same. Here we discover the cardinal principle of sexist ontology - the only good woman is a dead woman. When she is bad she lives, or when she lives she is bad. She has one real function, motherhood. In that function, because it is active, she is characterized by overwhelming malice, devouring greed, uncontrollable avarice. She is ruthless, brutal, ambitious, a danger to children and other living things. Whether called mother, queen stepmother or wicked witch, she is the wicked witch, the content of nightmare, the source of terror.

The Beautiful Lump of Ultimate Good

What can it do? It grows
It bleeds, it sleeps
It walks it talks
Singing, "love's got me, got me."
Kathleen Norris

For a woman to be good, she must be dead. Catatonia is the good woman's most winning quality.

Sleeping Beauty slept for 100 years, after pricking her finger on a spindle. The kiss of the heroic prince woke her. He fell in love with her while she was asleep, or was it because she was asleep?

Snow White was already dead when the heroic prince fell in love with her. "I beseech you," he pleaded with the 7 dwarfs. "to give it to me, for I cannot live without looking upon Snow White." It wake was not readily distinguishable from it asleep.

Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Snow White, Rapunzel - all are characterized by passivity, beauty, innocence and *victimization*. They are archetypal good women - victims by definition. They never think, act, initiate, confront, resist, challenge, feel, care or question. Sometimes they are forced to do housework.

They have one scenario of passage. They are moved, as if inert, from the house of the mother to the house of the prince. First they are objects of malice, then they are objects of romantic adoration. They do nothing to warrant either.

That one other figure of female good, the good fairy, appears from time to time, dispensing clothes or virtue. Her power cannot match, only occasionally moderate, the power of the

wicked witch. She does have one physical activity at which she excels - she waves her wand. She is beautiful, good and unearthly. Mostly she disappears.

These figures of female good are heroic models available to women. And the end of the story is, it would seem, the goal of female life. To sleep, perchance to dream?

The Prince, the Real Brother

The man of flesh and bone; the man who
Is born, suffers, and dies - above all, who
Dies; the man who eats and drinks and
Plays and sleeps and thinks and wills; the
Man who is seen and heard; the brother,
The real brother.

Miguel de Unamuno
Tragic Sense of Life

He is handsome and heroic. He is a prince, that is, he is powerful, noble and good. He rides a horse. He travels far and wide. He has a mission, a purpose. Inevitably he fulfills it. He is a person of worth and a worthwhile person. He is strong and true.

But, of course, he is not real, and men do suffer trying to become him. They suffer, and murder, and rape, and plunder. They use airplanes now.

What matters is that he is both powerful and good, that his power is by definition good. What matters is that he matters, acts, succeeds.

One can point out that in fact he is not very bright. For instance, he cannot distinguish Cinderella from her two sisters even though he danced with her and presumably conversed with her. His recurring love of corpses does not indicate a dynamic intelligence either. His fall from the tower onto thorns does not suggest that he is even physically coordinated, though, unlike his modern counterparts, he never falls off his horse or annihilates the wrong village.

The truth is that he is powerful and good when contrasted with her. The badder she is, the better he is. The deader she is, the better he is. That is one moral of the story, the reason for the dual role definition, and the shabby reality of man as hero.

The husband, the real father

*The desire of men to claim their children may be the
crucial impulse of civilized life*
George Gilder, Sexual Suicide

They are kings, or noble, or rich. They are aging, by definition, powerful and good. They are never responsible or held accountable for the evil done by their wicked wives. Most of the time, they do not notice it.

Of course, there is no rational basis for considering them either powerful or good. For while they are

governing, or kinging, or whatever it is that they do, their wives are slaughtering and abusing their beloved progeny. But then, in some cultures nonfairy-tale fathers simply had their female children killed at birth.

Cinderella's father saw her every day. He saw her picking lentils out of the ashes, dressed in rags, degraded, insulted. He was a good man.

The father of Hansel and Gretel also had a good heart. When his wife proposed to him that they abandon the children in the forest to starve he protested immediately "But I really pity the poor children." When Hansel and Gretel finally escaped the witch and found their way home "they rushed in at the door and fell at the father's neck. The man had not had a quiet hour since he left his children in the wood (Hansel, after all, was a boy) but the wife was dead." Do not misunderstand - they did not forgive him, for there was nothing to forgive. All malice originated with the woman. He was a good man.

Thought eh fairy tale father marries the evil woman in the first place, has no emotional connection with his child, does not interact in any meaningful way with her, abandons her and worse does not notice when she is dead and gone, he is a figure of male good. He is the patriarch, and as such he is beyond moral law and human decency.

The roles available to women and men are clearly articulated in fairy tales. The characters are vividly described, and so are the modes of relationship possible between them. We see that powerful women are bad, that good women are inert. We see that men are always good, no matter what they do, or do not do.

We also have an explicit rendering of the nuclear family. In that family, a mother's love is destructive, murderous. In that family, daughters are objects, expendable. The nuclear family, as we find it delineated in fairy tales, is a paradigm of male being-in-the-world, female evil and female victimization. It is a crystallization of sexist culture - the nuclear structure of that culture.

2. Once upon a time: The Moral of the Story

*Fuck that to death, the dead are holy,
Honor the sisters of your friends.*

*Pieces of ass, a piece of action,
Pieces.
The loneliest of mornings
Something mopes about in the mirror.
A slave's trick, survival.
I remember thinking, our last time:
If you killed me, I would die.*

Kathleen Norris

*I cannot live without my life.
Emily Bronte*

The lessons are simple, and we learn them well.

Men and women are different, absolute opposites.

The heroic prince can never be confused with Cinderella, or Snow White or Sleeping beauty. She could never do what he does at all, let alone better.

Men and women are different, absolute opposites.

The good father can never be confused with the bad mother. Their qualities are different, polar. Where he is erect, she is supine. Where he is awake, she is asleep. Where he is active, she is passive. Where she is erect, or awake, or active, she is evil and must be destroyed.

It is, structurally at least, that simple.

She is desirable in her beauty, passivity and victimization. She is desirable because she is beautiful, passive and victimized.

Her other persona, the evil mother, is repulsive in her cruelty. She is repulsive and must be destroyed. She is the female protagonist, the nonmale source of power which must be defeated, obliterated before male power can fully flower. She is repulsive because she is evil. She is evil because she acts.

She, the evil persona, is a cannibal. Cannibalism is repulsive. She is devouring and magical. She is devouring and the male must not be devoured.

There are two definitions of woman. There is the good woman. She is a victim. There is the bad woman. She must be destroyed. The good woman must be possessed. The bad woman must be killed or punished. Both must be nullified.

The bad woman must be punished, and if she is punished enough, she will become good. To be punished enough is to be destroyed. There is the good woman. She is the victim. The posture of victimization, the passivity of the victim demands abuse.

Women strive for passivity, because women want to be good. The abuse evoked by passivity convinces women they are bad. The bad need to be punished, destroyed, so that they can become good.

Even a woman who strives conscientiously for passivity sometimes does something. That she acts at all provokes abuse. The abuse provoked by that activity convinces her that she is bad. The bad need to be punished, destroyed, so that they can become good.

The moral of the story should, one would think, preclude a happy ending. It does not. The moral of the story is the happy ending. It tells us that happiness for a woman is to be passive, victimized, destroyed, or asleep. It tells us that happiness is for the woman who is good - inert, passive, victimized - and that a good woman is a happy woman. It tells us that the happy ending is when we are ended, when we live without our lives or not at all.