

Symbolic Themes in the European Cinderella Cycle

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Instead of setting out, in orthodox fashion, to archive the endless variations characteristic of fairy tales into fixed types—rendering fragmented, thus meaningless materials—the following analysis will try to bring forth from the given flux its underlying symbolic themes. This approach will be presented as applied to Iberian materials of the “Cinderella” cycle, considered in a comparative perspective; then some thoughts will be proposed on the nature of fairy tales’ symbolism.

It has long been recognized that the “Cinderella” theme is more complex than meets the eye. In 1893, Marian Cox integrated in the “Cinderella type” many tales in which the heroine is expelled from, instead of being forced to remain at, home. This author defined three basic headings within the Cinderella type: “Cinderella proper” as the heroine ill-treated by a stepmother at home, later to be recognized by means of a shoe; “Catskin,” defined as one who flees home disguised in some skin to avoid marrying her “unnatural father”; and “Cap o’ Rushes,” expelled by her father and later disguised under some rough cover for answering in an apparently unsatisfactory way—usually involving a comparison to salt—the question: “how much do you love me?” Furthermore, Cox construed a fourth heading to accommodate a large number of “indeterminate tales” not fitting any of the preceding classes, and yet a fifth relating to a male Cinderella (1893:xxv). In 1951, this whole field—the indeterminacy of whose borders was candidly admitted by Cox (xxxiv)—has been termed by Anna Rooth the “Cinderella Cycle” (1951). Within this field, Christine Goldberg recently noted, “however the tales are defined, there will inevitably be some variants that have characteristics of two or more types” (1997:28).

As far as Iberian tradition is concerned, Aurélio Espinosa strove to define each of Cox’s three main groups in the following way: Cinderella proper is ill-treated at home, but is helped out by her dead mother, a fairy,

the Virgin Mary, or yet by an animal. She receives magical dresses, meets the prince at the church or in a ball, and drops a shoe as she escapes thence. After being recognized through the lost shoe, marriage is celebrated (1947: 415-16, 424). Catskin, for her part, flees her incestuous father. The dead mother, a fairy or the Virgin helps her. At the balls she meets the prince, who lends her three gifts. These she afterwards introduces into food she prepares for the lovesick prince, who heals instantly as he recognizes her; marriage is celebrated (412). Last, her father sentences Cap o' Rushes to death. She is however spared by the executioners, and then finds work as a fowl keeper at the royal palace. The prince falls in love with her. At the marriage celebration, all food served to the bride's father is salt-free. As he finally understands the value of salt, the father makes peace with his daughter (409).

Although Espinosa presumes to present thus the "Hispanic type" of Cap o' Rushes, the "perfect version" of Catskin, and the "fundamental form" of Cinderella (1947:409, 412, 415), he is well aware of the prevailing mixture of themes in this group of tales, and hence of the ideal character of the above classification. Indeed, this author notices that the main differences are to be found in the initial sequences, the rest of the tales being basically identical. Since classifications are built upon precisely those initial variations, which he moreover takes as secondary, he cannot but acknowledge the unsatisfactory results of typological endeavors, which he nevertheless pursues (407, 416).

Espinosa finds himself entangled in the hopeless task of attempting to distinguish inseparable tales because he fails to ask: how are they simultaneously alike and different? In other words: what is the underlying foundation of observed differences? For, indeed, it is only on semantic grounds—by asking what is the basis for the equivalence of different motifs—that the paralyzing opposition between unfathomable unity and superficial differences can be overcome.

In what follows, while I will first turn my attention to precisely such differences as have served to split a common field into meaningless shreds, I will attempt using them to reconstitute the underlying picture of which they are variant expressions. For a start, I will then ask: what is there in common between fleeing a pressing father and being expelled by an angry father? And between being forced to leave home by a loving father and being kept home by a hateful stepmother? The very neatness of these inversions betrays a series of variations on a single theme. But what is this theme? This I will try to ascertain in the following section, entitled *Rejuvenation*. Then, in sections named *Skins*, *Flowers*, *Salt*, and *Riddle*, I will at-

tempt to shed some light on the main symbolic clusters involved. Finally, some concluding remarks will be offered.

While all results will be inferred from analysis of European materials in and by themselves, I shall occasionally call attention to the fact that many symbolic traits laid forth are not exclusively European. Indeed it is useful to keep in mind that different systems of representations, operating in widely different cultures, often display equivalent symbolic foundations. Analysis conducted within one single context gains depth; comparative awareness grants perspective. Ultimately, I think, depth and perspective should strengthen one another.

Rejuvenation

According to a Portuguese version of Catskin (entitled "The Wooden Doll"), a king and a queen have a very ugly daughter. She is so ugly, in fact, that when they attend to the birthday party of a neighboring prince she dances only with her father. Then the queen dies after extorting from the king the promise to remarry only a bride who is rendered beautiful by a head-kerchief she leaves behind. Only the daughter fits this condition; hence the king decides to marry her. The daughter flees home within a wooden doll, works as a fowl keeper at the palace of the neighboring king, and there marries the prince (Oliveira, 1:56-59). Note that the king's decision to marry his daughter stems from a promise made to his dying wife, and the girl becomes beautiful as she tries on her mother's kerchief. In fact, this is one of many ways of saying that the daughter is, or becomes, just like her mother. Thus, in other European versions the mother's necklace (Oliveira, 2:226-28), ring (Pedroso 1984:no. 16) or shoes (Dozon 1881:no. 6) will fit only her daughter, who has golden teeth (Canziani 1928:236-38; Cox 1893:no. 147) or hair just like her mother, of whom—in short—she is the live semblance (Grimm no. 65). The so-called "unnatural father" woos then in his daughter a new version of his wife, as he follows the promise—extolled by the deceased—of marrying no other woman.

Now, whatever else lies behind the answer that Cap o' Rushes provides to her father's question of "how much do you love me," it seems clear that the father expels her on account of not loving him enough. William Shakespeare expresses this very clearly as he has Cordelia—his own version of the fairy tale heroine—say, after her sisters' hyperbolic expressions of feigned love, "I love your majesty according to my bond, no more nor less" (1984:24). The father's wrath at this measured answer, seen in the light of his joy at the equivalent answer by the eldest daughter in a Portu-

guese oral version (Barbosa 1915:214), betrays a definite infatuation for the younger daughter. Indeed, Alan Dundes perceptively remarked, "the 'love like salt' plot appears to be a weakened form of the folktale plot in which a 'mad' father tries to marry his own daughter" (1980:215). One should not lose sight of the fact, however, that the "mad" father is really the deceased mother's puppet. More precisely, then, the "love like salt" motif is a variation on the wooing, by a father, of the live image of his deceased wife. Consequently it is still the dead mother, reproduced in the daughter for whom the king cannot contain his longing, who hovers behind the scenes.

Furthermore, the stepmother figure in fairy tales is essentially a negative replacement for the mother. More exactly, the "dark" stepmother replacing the "golden" mother is, quite literally, the dead woman's "dark shadow" on earth. As Charles Ploix understood, the plight of the heroine under her stepmother's tyranny is a form of enchantment (1891:103-4); it is, in other words, a symbolic death. One might thus say that the heroine relegated to temporary death by the stepmother taps then the life-giving aspect of her departed mother, and thus emerges beautiful—as a rejuvenated mother—from the death-connoting cinders. In other words the stepmother leads the heroine into death, resurrection and marriage as a living image of the mother, just as, in "The Wooden Doll," the dying mother's injunction actually leads to the marriage of the daughter who perpetuates her. Both the excessively loving father and the relentlessly hating stepmother represent then the dead mother in apparently monstrous ways, as they operate the deceased woman's rejuvenation through the daughter led into marriage to become a mother. The fundamental theme reflected in various guises in the Cinderella cycle is then that of the rejuvenation of a supernatural woman through her daughter, by means of a process of death and resurrection.

This simple pattern is sometimes complicated by the fact that in the Iberian tradition the mother's death is often replicated in an animal shape. Thus the heroine is sent out to tend a cow variously associated with the deceased mother, who assists her. The stepmother decides to have the cow killed; the animal instructs the girl to wash its entrails in a brook, and then follow whatever comes out of them. The girl is led into the aquatic dwelling of three fairies, or else meets the celestial Mother. Then she receives a series of three gifts such as marvelous beauty, golden hair or a shining golden moon or star on her forehead, and the ability to produce flowers or gems whenever she speaks. Note how the motherly cow, put to death by the stepmother, leads the girl to fairies who elaborate on the gift of beauty

as seen in "The Wooden Doll." The essential identity between the cow and the mother is explicitly stated in Eastern European versions, and furthermore the equation between the mother and the fairies is made clear by Iberian texts in which the dying mother bestows on her daughter one or more of the same "three graces" (Espinosa no. 111-13; Pedroso no. 23).

Skins

Indeed, the usual depiction of the heroine and her mother as marvelously beautiful, with golden hair, is certainly comparable to that of fairies (Pócs 1989,14-15), while the stepmother is often similar to that of a witch. Now, fairies appear both under benign and malevolent ("witchy") aspects. Such ambivalence is clearest in tales whenever fairies put contrasted spells upon one single girl thus made to alternate between two states (see Cardigos 1996: 128). For instance, in Italian tales three out of four fairies may grant the heroine her usual three graces, while the fourth fairy spells her into becoming a serpent (Calvino 1982:no. 150). Or else, four out of five frogs fate her to "shine like the sun, even when it is cloudy," but the fifth (to whom she inadvertently broke a leg) spells her to change into a snake "the minute she sees a ray of sun" (no. 64). The heroine is thus turned into both the ray of sun and the serpent, by fairies as frogs—that is, in a zoomorphic shape related to the underworld (Calvino:227; cf. Pócs 1 1989:13).

Often the girl's duality is projected onto contrasted personæ. In Iberian versions of Cinderella an envious half-sister frequently impersonates the grim dimension as she attempts to replicate the heroine's adventure, only to become black as night, receive a donkey's tail or goat horn on her forehead, and be cursed to produce excrement, toads or serpents whenever she speaks. After this happens, the stepmother does her best to tarnish the stepdaughter's shine by placing her under cinders or in a dark place, and attempts to marry off her own daughter to the prince while disguising her ugliness. There is then a cyclical, inverted correlation between the girl who becomes luminous, is therefore plunged into darkness and emerges therein in full radiance, and the one who becomes black, is nevertheless elevated to the limelight, but ends her days associated to excrement and serpents. More precisely the two stepsisters are as two aspects of one single entity, the "black" dimension of which emerges on stage whenever the bright one is put into darkness. This of course replicates the relationship between mother and stepmother as seen above, since—as Charles Perrault was keen enough to point out—the contrasted half-sisters take after their own mothers.

Now, the observed modes of cyclical duality strongly suggest that to be enchanted amounts to revert to an ophidian condition. In order to briefly

confirm this, I will resort to widely known materials. The aquatic setting of fairies in the Iberian tradition corresponds to Mother Holle's underwater realm in Grimm no. 24, and moreover the fact that Iberian fairies often appear to the girls in the guise of birds (Pedroso 1984:no.18, 37) is akin to the appearance of Aschenputtel's dead mother in the same guise (Grimm no. 21). This is significant, since the Grimms describe the girl who first visits Mother Holle as the "Cinderella of the house," and indeed this girl gets her golden hue from Mother Holle after spending a snowy winter underground, just as Aschenputtel proper receives her clothes from a tree she planted on her mother's tomb after thaw. In both instances, the means for the heroine's marriage then come in Springtime from an underground/underwater realm, the nature of which is made clear by the fact that the skin covering the fleeing heroine at the same point is often that of a recently dead woman (see Cox 1893:nos. 141, 147, 155, 215, 281; cf. Cosquin 1922:5-6; Goldberg 1997:33-38; Hartland 1886:317).

In view of this, it is worth noting that Mother Holle is said to have such large teeth that the "good" girl gets frightened upon first seeing her. In a British version, the same character is described as a green lady whom both girls (peeping through a keyhole) see dancing with a bogey, and the food offered in this house takes those who would eat it to the graveyard (Briggs 1991:286-89). Furthermore, the joint consideration of the British green lady and of the big-toothed German fairy living in an underground, aquatic realm suggests an ophidian entity, which indeed stands clearly revealed in the case of Arie, a French cognate of Holle (Gennep 1987:3019-23; Grimm 1882:412). From the perspective of the continuity between the dead mother and her daughter, the dead mother's image reappearing at her prime through her daughter's shed of a skin therefore suggests the self-rejuvenation of an ophidian entity. Reconsider, in this perspective, the Grimms' version of "Cinderella." Here the dying mother tells her child that she will watch her from up above, then is buried down below. A tree growing on the grave, from which boughs a bird helps out the heroine, synthesizes this apparent polarity. As Marija Gimbutas remarked, a tree and a vertically spiralled serpent are interchangeable symbols connoting "a column of life rising from caves and tombs," since "the life force of the snake is linked to that of the dead. . . . Thus the snake symbolizes the continuity of life between the generations" (1989:121, 136-37). In the Grimms' version the tree symbolizes, I suggest, such ophidian-like continuity by linking the mother and the daughter as avian entities—the first appearing in the guise of pigeons; the latter as a "goose," commanding "all the birds beneath the sky" and betraying her identity by hiding in the dove-cote.

This brings us back to the Iberian fairies appearing as birds, and suggests an overall pattern of the serpent/bird identity. There is nothing really new about this. Carl Kerényi, for one, noted that in ancient Greece the daughters of the serpent-tailed “Old One of the Sea” were “maidens resembling swans” (1998:42-46, 51, 99). Likewise, William Ralston pointed out that in Russian tradition “beauteous maidens who usually live beneath the wave, but who can transform themselves into birds and fly wherever they please,” are mostly the daughters of the “Water King” (1873:119-20). Not surprisingly, Claude Gaignebet—who acknowledges that the “woman-bird was one of the shapes of the supernatural bride of whom Mélusine is the typical example”—is then well aware of Cinderella’s “otherworldly” origin (Gaignebet and Florentin 1974:95, 103). From another point of view, Gimbutas brought to notice a very old symbolism of life renewal clustering around a self-regenerating entity that she ascribed to the “mythic watery sphere” (1989:25) and described “as separate figures and as a single divinity. . . . She is one and she is two, sometimes snake, sometimes bird” (1982, 11 2). The same notion underscores, I suggest, the homology as found in the Grimms’ collection between Cinderella’s buried mother appearing in the guise of a bird, and Holle connoting a serpent linked to the watery realm.

Note that Perchta—a Germanic variant of Holle—would supposedly blind anyone who would peep at her on her annual visits to houses (Frazer 1983, 3:565-67). In the British tale referred to above, the Green Lady also blinds both girls as they peep at her (but the water in her well restores the “good” girl’s eyesight). In Grimms’ “Aschenputtel,” birds from the mother’s grave’s tree provide the heroine with shining garments, but pluck out the half-sisters’ eyes. Mother Holle instead rewards one girl by granting her a golden hue, and punishes the other by turning her black. The equivalence between turning blind and pitch-dark (as well as between shining out and regaining eyesight) is clear from Iberian texts in which the heroine endowed with “three graces” undergoes her period of darkness—from which she emerges to light—not under ground, cinders, hides etc., but rather as a time of blindness. Isabel Cardigos notes that, as “the heroine’s eyes are gouged out . . . she lives in blackness, the essence of her darker companion while the latter performs the role of the king’s bride” (1996, 129). Furthermore, this author remarks that the death of the “black” girl in “The White Bride and the Black Bride” theme corresponds to the end of a single heroine’s enchantment as a snake (128, 141).

Compare also, the Grimms’ version in which Cinderella’s sisters become lame just before turning blind (Grimm no. 21), to the above-quoted

Italian version in which a lame frog fates the girl to be a serpent (Calvino no. 64). Reciprocally, the image of the Grimms' half-uncovered Cinderella being recognized by the prince as she stands on a heavy clog and on a golden slipper (Grimm no. 21)—also present in Iberian oral tradition (Oliveira, 1:409-11)—suggests (between darkness and light) an uneven gait. The implication is clear: a bride emerging from a snake-like condition in the netherworld cannot immediately walk steadily. This calls attention to the recurring identification of brides with serpents. For example, “in Scotland a serpent was supposed to emerge from the hills on Imbolc, the Day of Bride (Brigit) (‘Today is the day of Bride; the serpent shall come from the hole’)” (Gimbutas 1989:135). Also, in Greece the word “nymph” means “bride,” up to modern times the marriage of men with Nereids was regarded “a credible occurrence,” and indeed brides were customarily assimilated to such descendants of the serpent-like “Old One of the Sea” (Lawson 1964:131, 133-34; cf. Kerényi 1998:42-45, 99). In the same vein, the widespread French custom of abducting a bride’s shoe—occasionally replacing it by a clog—explicitly involves the idea of presenting a lame bride for marriage (Gennep 1980:2:411-12). It would thus seem as if serpents were at the origin of brides; an uneven gait in preparation for marriage betraying an ophidian origin, just as becoming lame upon renouncing marriage means a return to basics.

In the light of the idea that the mother/daughter axis of continuity entails a rejuvenation in the bird/serpent shape characteristic of enchanted, death phases, it becomes significant that the Catskin/Cap o’ Rushes heroine should often watch fowl as she goes under hide. One conclusion—empirically borne out by Spanish variants in which the fowl keeper dresses in a pelican suit (Taggart 1990:94-99, 106-9)—is that the bird-keeping heroine is herself like a bird. Indeed, Germaine Mailliet points out the equivalence between enduring one’s fate as a gooseherd and having the goose-shaped or otherwise deformed foot characteristic of Berthe/Perchta/Holle (Mailliet 1980:185-89; cf. Grimm 1882:429-33). The Grimms themselves were well-aware of the close connection between Berthe and a goose girl (Bunt 1968:2:383; cf. Goldberg 1996). Moreover Propp noticed the equivalence between furry and feather coverings in tales (1983, 173-74), with the implication that the heroine’s furry skin is also like a bird’s plumage. Likewise the bear/wild man figure, in which Propp rightfully recognized the male equivalent of Grimm’s *Allerleirauh* (1983:173), appears in French Carnival customs in either fur or feathers (Gennep 1979:922-24). The furry heroine’s close association with geese or other fowl, corresponding to her identification with birds in “Cinderella” versions, is then to be un-

derstood as one more instance of the examined bird/snake equivalence, to which furry animals may now be added under the common denominator of an engulfing second skin.

From this point of view it is understandable that one Italian teller should describe the heroine's hide as both a wolf's fur and an old woman's skin (Cox 1893, no. 147), as indeed this equivalence and the geriatric connotation of the serpent's slough (Frazer 1984:78-79 n. 8; Gimbutas 1989:135) are one and the same thing. It also makes sense that, where the snake symbolism is not apparent, the dead mother should be presented as a horned animal; horns aptly representing the notion of a swing between periods of time, hence of becoming (Chassany 1989:194-96; Gaignebet and Florentin 1974:54-55, 78-79, 112, 131, 135-36, 158-61; Gaignebet and Lajoux 1985:100; Gimbutas 1982:91-95; Gimbutas 1989:75-79, 265-75). All in all, then, to live under a "black" woman's tyranny in cinders (oftentimes represented as a "cinders skin"), to go under a hide, to follow through water the entrails of a horned animal, to become a bird and to join a serpent underground are so many images of a symbolic death represented in terms of a shape-shifting second skin, the shedding of which figures rebirth.

This is seemingly a fundamental image in symbolic thought. Ananda Coomaraswamy noted that "in the traditional doctrine about transformation or shape-shifting all changes of appearance are thought of in terms of the putting on or taking off of a skin or cloak," of which he speaks in the context of a discussion on regeneration (1945, 398). More specifically, James George Frazer's perception of the unity of old Mediterranean area beliefs in birds' and serpents' rejuvenation through the molting of feathers and the casting of skins (1984:78-79) corresponds to Gimbutas's suggestion that pre-historical figurines of "a combined snake and water bird with a long phallic neck" convey an androgynous theme linked to death and regeneration, traceable to Upper Paleolithic times in Old Europe (1982:144-45, 152-53). But let me go back to the tales.

Flowers

One major inference to draw out of the equivalence between a maiden's enchantment as enveloped within a skin or cinders, and as joining a serpent underground is that such a theme amounts to that of a maiden swallowed, or kept underground, by a dragon. Take for example this Spanish tale in which a hero disenchants a princess from a palace of no return—referred to as an "enchantment"—by killing there a seven-headed serpent (Espinosa 1946, no. 139). In a variant the "enchantment" is actually the enchanted maiden, imprisoned by a giant whose life lies within an egg

within a serpent (Espinosa 1987:no. 66). According to a third version the maiden defines her own enchantment as the fact that her warden will not die unless a hedgehog—appearing as the giant's alter ego as well as the serpent's allomotif—is defeated (Espinosa 1946, no. 141). Furthermore, a Portuguese version clearly states that the maiden's enchantment is "a serpent" (Coelho, no. 22).

So, the "enchantment" is both the princess and her warden. More precisely, "enchantment" denotes a situation in which the princess is connected to a snake that is male and yet represents her condition, which is therefore both internal to her and externalized. Thus Cardigos remarks "the link between the dragon and the maiden" as she, too "loses her tongue" (in the sense that she becomes mute) when the dragon is killed and his tongues cut out (1996:64). But then, to liberate a princess by slaying a dragon should be tantamount to slaying the dragon in her (Coomaraswamy 1945:393, 399-401; Holbek 1987:425-26). Moreover, such equivalence is another way of saying that a maiden is disenchanting from an ophidian condition into marriage.

Indeed, marriage drives the serpent away (see Cardigos 1996:141). For example, according to a Spanish version of the "Blind Girl" theme, a girl was born along with a serpent. The snake lives under an orange tree, washes and combs her "sister" every day. As the girl marries, the serpent retreats into the deep sea. After marrying and giving birth the heroine is blinded and dispossessed of her husband; then the serpent reappears, disenchanting her sister by replacing her eyes in their sockets, and again goes away (Ampudia 1925:no. 9). Or take this German version of Cinderella/Catskin in which the jealous stepmother wishes to get rid of the heroine by getting her married. She therefore causes her stepdaughter to swallow a young serpent. As the heroine's belly grows she is calumniated and expelled in twelve handsome dresses covered by a wood mantle. She works as a gooseherd, the prince beholds her dresses as she strips to follow the geese into the water, then—after the maiden falls asleep in the shade—he watches a huge serpent come out of her lips. This snake he drives away with the very golden ring he will use as a marriage token (Cox:no. 298).

Furthermore, between the maiden and her serpent there is a blood connection. In a Portuguese dragon-slayer tale, a drop of the serpent's blood falling on the princess's handkerchief foreshadows happiness in marriage (Oliveira n.d., 1:148-50). According to another Portuguese tale the delivered maiden is only really free for married life after the death of a seven-headed serpent, one drop of whose blood spills onto the bride as she lies in the bridal bed (Oliveira n.d., 1:106-08). Note also that it is after

spilling some own blood from a finger that the persecuted maiden descends into Frau Holle's well. In such well another German version reports a water-nixie (Hunt 1968, 1:371). According to a Spanish version the heroine herself is turned into a kind of water-nixie—instead of being blinded as above—as she suffers attack after giving birth to a child (Curiel Merchán 1944:257-61). In yet another text reported by the Grimms, such attack consists in being thrown into a well of blood (Hunt 1968, 1:364). In short, then, to shed blood as a maiden brings one close to a serpent within a well (cf. Verdier 1979:242-43); to marry is tantamount to bleeding the serpent and driving it back into the deep waters; but to give birth amounts to temporarily return into a serpent-like condition akin to being plunged into a well of blood. All in all, the serpent appears, then, as the shed blood of female physiology.

In this sense, note that the blood of puberty is frequently named “flowers”—thus the expressions “fleurs rouges,” “Rosencrantz” for menses (see Grahn 1993:231-33)—and that a Corsican maiden has just smelled a flower when she is kidnapped by a dragon into a well (Massignon: no. 7). Other times a maiden is taken into the monster's underground lair after her father cuts a rose that bleeds (Belmont 1996:66). In a sense the rosier is the serpent; thus the snake lives under the rose bush (*loc. cit.*), the plant itself immobilizes the girl's father in snake-like tangles (Cox:no. 297), the dragon's blood is to be seen by the rose bush (Oliveira n.d., 1:72-74), and the roses' scent turns men into stone (cf. Oliveira, 1:59-62, 78-82). However, it is also true that the maiden asks her father for a rose as beautiful as herself (Vasconcelos:no. 111) or is otherwise identified to whatever flower she asks for (Cosquin 1978, 2:218), is fated to produce roses as she speaks or washes (Espinosa:no. 111), asks for a dress “with all sorts of roses in the world” (Ampudia:no. 32; cf. Taggart 1990:113), and is indeed in one case named “Flower of the Rose;” her mother being the rose plant and she the bloom (Barbosa 1917:107-08). The girl under the dragon's spell therefore bleeds while being in bloom; indeed, she is a maiden “in flowers” in the sense of the French expression “jeune fille en fleurs” (see Verdier 1979:67, 70-71, 193). It is therefore understandable that the serpent's power ceases, and that “serpent's” blood should appear, as the maiden is deflowered (cf. Cardigos 1996:64). Even after marriage, however, the serpent's spell returns cyclically, every month and at every birth (cf. Coomaraswamy 1945:397-99).

The serpent's spell now appears as the very essence of the mother/daughter's continuity. This we have seen so far as both skin shedding and cyclic blood. The two images are closely related since the notion of such blood as “flowers” supposes, both logically and in actual cross-cultural con-

ceptions, a process of blooming and going into fruit (Calame Griaule 1987, 28; Delaney, Lupton, and Toth 1988:168; Gottlieb 1988:58, 74) whereby three generations—in our tales the rosier, its bloom, and the fruit to come—are implied. Furthermore, to shed blood and to cast a skin are generally equivalent modes of going about such renovation. As Gaignebet persuasively calls attention to the equivalence between the bird/deformed foot, a shaggy skin and menstruation as related to European female figures named after roses or the new moon, the implication is indeed that menstruation is like a regenerating change of skin (1985:106-10).

From a comparative analysis of Vedic and Celtic texts under a different perspective, Coomaraswamy likewise shows that the lunar periodicity of women reflects the transformation of a Serpent into the Perfect Bride as effected by females bearing floral names, and he speaks therefore of “regeneration, thought of as the casting of the slough” (1945:397-99). From yet a different point of view, Chris Knight, working on Australian data, posits the equivalence of cycling and snake women (1991:458). Quite independently Steven Hugh-Jones, working on an Amazonian Indian community, states that “for the Barasana, to change skins is a way to rejuvenation and hence to immortality. . . . Menstruation, they say, is an internal changing of skin. . . . Immortality and periodicity are linked. . . . Creatures that shed their skins, a sign of periodicity, are also immortal” (1979:182-83). That this rendering of remote beliefs so aptly sums up the foregoing analysis goes to suggest, I think, that a fundamental layer of symbolism has been attained.

Salt

Since the expelled heroine’s permanence under a skin is often explicitly associated to salt, a convincing analysis cannot proceed without taking this into account. It must now be asked why is it that the heroine is condemned to death as soon as she expresses “love like salt” to her father? Why is it that during her exile she is actually depicted as covered with salt? And how do these problems relate to the foregoing analysis?

In Iberian variants the heroine usually answers her father’s question by telling him that she loves him “as the taste of salt” (Barbosa no. 15) “as salt in food” (Milá y Fontanals, no. 5), “as the flavor of flavors” (Soromenho and Soromenho, no. 733); or “as food [or meat] wants salt” (Braga 1987:175-76; Espinosa 1946, no. 107; Oliveira n.d., 1:372 74; Soromenho and Soromenho no. 734); or yet “as salt wants water” (Curiel Merchán 1944:346-48; Espinosa, no. 122); “as salt in water” (Espinosa, no. 120, 121, 123, 124). Occasionally, she bluntly declares to love him “like a good shit”

(Espinosa, no. 108; Sanchez Perez, no. 87). The obvious message is that the heroine expresses her love in a ciphered way (scatological references helping to the effect) so that the father misses her point. Beyond this superficial level of misunderstood true love for the "flavor of flavors," one must however account as much for the fact that both the heroine and her father are actually assimilated to salt, as for the ineluctable necessity of the father/daughter separation as soon as this common value is mentioned. So, what exactly is the "value of salt" in the cultural context of these tales?

Yvonne Verdier, based on fieldwork conducted in a French village, notes that salt is symbolically akin to sauces as both enhance the flavor of food. Furthermore, she adduces evidence for a relationship "barely metaphorical, almost concrete" between sauces and menstruation, which of course supposes the equivalence of menstruation and salt. Indeed, "avoir le cul en meurette" (literally, having the ass as in a special sort of wine sauce) means menstruation, otherwise also called *la salaison des femmes*, "the salt of women." However, salt is also conceived as a male, fertilizing principle; thus (male) trousers are called *saloir* ("salting trough") even though one name for this brine container is "mother"; which points back to the "salt of women" (Verdier 1979:32, 40; cf. Testart 1991:43). Therefore we are faced with an equivalence between semen and menstruation under the common value of salt. Indeed, Alain Testart pointedly stresses the cross-cultural equivalence of salt to both blood and semen, and he deduces from it a general underlying identity of these substances. Consequently, he interprets a widespread salt taboo enforced on menstruating and pregnant women as a precaution against cumulating two instances of one single value (1991:43-44, 47). Indeed this goes to explain both the recurrent ban on sexual relations during menses and the fact, reported from both France and Portugal, that feminine blood threatens meat preserved by salt (Lawrence 1988:124; Verdier 1979:36-37, 40).

Incidentally, the fact that feces appear as an allomotif of salt may be tentatively accounted for on the same grounds. Whereas semen and menstrual blood are bodily emissions peculiar to each sex, feces are sexually unmarked and, therefore, equivalent to salt as a synthetic value shared by both father and daughter. One interesting Spanish variant, discussed by James Taggart (1990:106-11), associates putting on the pelican suit, the release of excrement and an implicit menstrual connotation, then links the final shedding of the skin to the notion of defecation prevented by means of a purple thread. Compare this to another text in which the filthy defecating father is ordered to wash up so as to concede his daughter's hand in marriage (Sánchez Perez 1942:313). In other words both defecation and a

connection to salt, virtually uniting the father and his daughter, must stop before her marriage takes place.

Now, the equivalence between menstruation and the “flavor of flavors” is not a trivial one. Consider Alma Gottlieb’s assertion that the haute cuisine of the Beng of Ivory Coast is a cuisine of menstruation, since women are supposed to cook better when they are menstruating; this being especially true of a much relished dish that, after cooking for many hours, “develops into a rich, deep red, not unlike the color of menstrual blood” (1988:71-72). Note that in our tales the heroine cooks both for her future husband and for her father. Cooking for the prince generally leads to the shedding of her skin. While some variants present the princess in her radiant dresses as she cooks (Canziani 1928:238), according to others she still drops salt from her chest while doing so (Taggart 1990:96, cf. 102; Curiel Merchán 1944:346-48; cf. Espinosa, no. 120). The result of the cooking act that redeems both the bride and the bridegroom—that is the actual food, offered as the skin is shed, that heals the love-sick prince—may then be interpreted as a menstrual cuisine of enhanced flavor, as opposed to the insipid food served to the father. I mean therefore a cuisine of amorously enhanced flavor, in accordance with both the equivalence of flavor-enhancing salt and sauces to menstrual blood and with the association of this substance to amorous passion, as perceived by Verdier in contemporary France (1979:45-47). In this sense, the heroine’s initial definitions of “love like salt” for her father—she as food and he as salt, she as salt and he as waster, her love for him as salt in water—definitely carry an incestuous connotation, as pointed out by Dundes from a different perspective (1980:214-22). Note, however, that from the moment when the heroine defines her love in terms of salt she suffers radical separation from her father while being covered with salt and shedding salt-water tears. Conversely, it is as she marries a younger wooer that she banishes salt from her relationship with her father. In other words the heroine’s identification with father in terms of salt triggers their radical separation, often decreed as a death sentence. Symmetrically, her identity to mother requires that the older woman die from the outset; otherwise the “Snow White” theme of a murderous mother would crop up. As the daughter replacing her mother in terms of feminine blood becomes equivalent to father in terms of salt, the essential affinity between mother and father thus becomes clear in the terms of the formula “blood is to blood as salt is to blood” (Testart 1991:44) which, therefore, defines the essential identity of the three actors. Furthermore, the displacement of the value of salt from the king father to the

prince wooer suggests that the older and the younger man are united by salt as the two women are by blood. Indeed, the compatibility of the incest theme to the fact that the father/daughter's proximity triggers their parting demands that we suppose—in accordance with Maria Tatar (1987:152)—that the heroine as a rejuvenated mother finally marries, in the prince, her rejuvenated father. A definite overall incestuous configuration thus appears, for as long as one takes the view that all dramatis personæ are discrete units. However, the observed essential unity of the characters encourages one to speak instead of a fundamental androgyny underlying all aspects of a complex, ophidian entity that self-rejuvenates through a process of death and resurrection, on the model of a serpent's cast of skin.

Riddle

Recall that I have proposed that the mother rejuvenates through her daughter as a snake shedding its skin and that the dragon is a male warden representing, nevertheless, the maiden's condition. Occasionally the enchanted maiden is said to be kept underground by her own father (Ampudia, no. 12), and Bengt Holbek thus rightly identified the dragon as a paternal figure (1987:425-26). This is however much too simple, since, as we saw, the dragon as a flower is both a male and the essence the girl inherits from mother. That the dragon appears as father, mother, and the girl herself suggests therefore a symbolic link between intimacy during menstruation and incest (cf. Héritier 1994:80). This can be stated more precisely by saying that the heroine appears engulfed in her own blood, in the embracing sense—suggested by the equivalence of salt and menses—of undifferentiated kin essence.

In this case, a theme of obscured identity should lie at the core of this group of tales. Indeed, my present model calls attention to the fact that the heroine under hide is—quite literally—an enigma to be unraveled (Goldberg 1997:29). Either as she hints, at the balls, that she is the same lowly wretch the prince loathes and mistreats at home, or as she implies, at home, that she is the same radiant girl her step-relatives saw at the balls, no one can unveil the riddle in her until her hide falls off. The gist of this theme is, then, that the hidden maiden appears as two separate persons, the final identification of whom leads to marriage.

It is therefore interesting that Claude Lévi-Strauss has come to see such final "identification of personæ at first presented as distinct" as characteristic of Oedipus-like themes worldwide (1973:32). This author noticed a persistent correlation of enigma and incest in narratives that "al-

ways assimilate the discovery of incest to the solution of a live enigma personified by the hero." The reason for this, he suggests, is that "like the solved enigma, incest unites terms that ought to remain separate: the son sexually joins the mother, and the brother his sister, as the answer unexpectedly joins the question" (34). Note that Lévi-Strauss is actually saying two things: first, that a solved enigma is tantamount to incest (thus, solving the riddle of the Sphinx gets Oedipus into wedlock with his mother—see Vernant 1986:54), and second, that incest itself is like an unresolved enigma (in the sense that incestuous Oedipus is finally the very enigma he proposes to discover—see Vernant 1972:104-105). Indeed, Sophocles pointedly says that Oedipus became one with his father (1209-12) and a brother to his own children (1481-82) as he procreated with his mother. The hero synthesizing three generations—thus figuratively having four, two, and three feet—therefore becomes the very enigma of the Sphinx, which he has to handle anew as he discovers himself (Edmunds 1995:160; Vernant 1986:54-55).

In other words, Lévi-Strauss's model implies that to solve a riddle leads to incest, which constitutes its perpetrator into the very enigma he was wont to solve. Beyond the homology between an answer joining a forbidding question and a forbidden relative joining another, this model thus highlights the fact that incest operates a dissolution of the perpetrator's identity within a group of closest kin. As Sophocles stresses that Oedipus shed in his father's blood his own blood, and then repeated the same act by "plowing," in his mother's womb, the very place where he was "sown" (1496-499)—therefore becoming one with his father and a brother to his own children—the implication seems to be that the incestuous hero becomes engulfed in both own and kin blood as he returns to his own roots.

Now, the foregoing considerations by Lévi-Strauss were based on a definition of enigma as "a question to which there will be presumably no answer," and its opposite as "an answer to which there has been no question" (Lévi-Strauss 1973:33). Marie-Louise Tenèze placed her discussion on the "fairy tale as genre" within this frame as she proposed to define "the inversion placing the 'answer' before the 'question,' the acquisition of the means before its end," as the defining characteristic of such tales (1970:20-21). By this she means not merely that the main character possesses prophetic powers (23), but more fundamentally that the hero or heroine is the preset solution to a challenge yet to emerge (29-31). One consequence of Tenèze's insight is that the fairy tale's main character is a living enigma for as long as the motivating challenge has not yet come into being. In the terms of the

above discussion one might then say that the fairy tale's main character is, structurally, an incestuous one.

However, as Tèneze remarkably suggests that all remaining characters appear as manifestations of either the main character or the antagonist—and that the latter may ultimately fuse with the former—(1970:29-31), the notion of incest appears, once more, as but a partial pointer to a fundamental unity beyond contrasts; in other words, as a reflection in sociological terms of the “monist philosophy” that Testart sees as characteristic of symbolic thought generally (1991:22, 64-65). Indeed, in the observed tales, the unity of the white and red substances of consanguinity under the common value of salt suggests an undifferentiated kin essence pervading an ophidian entity that self-rejuvenates through a process of death and resurrection. Now this is a variant image of the Dragon Slayer theme, seen by Propp as the basis of the entire store of fairy tales (1968:114), in which, to quote Propp's words, “he who was born from the dragon will kill the dragon” (1983:363, cf. 290-91) and, to use Holbek's expression, “the hero wins the princess by slaying her father in effigy” (1987, 560), really (still according to Holbek) by overcoming “the father in his daughter” (426).

Conclusion: The Problem in Perspective

It has been awhile now since Coomaraswamy highlighted the “metaphysical foundations” of “serpent worship and its iconography” in relation to a principle of “Supreme Identity” beyond “outwardly opposing forces” (1935:1), and pointed out the operation of such notions in folklore (1944:120-25; 1945: 402-04). Indeed, it is in this perspective that Propp's and Holbek's jointly quoted statements—not so intended by their authors—deploy the full quality of their meaning. This of course poses a problem, which I will best introduce by drawing on the insights of anthropologists who likewise recognized, albeit in an altogether different context, the metaphysical implications of serpent symbolism.

As far as Australian ethnography goes, Kenneth Maddock notes “how hard it is to do justice to aboriginal imagery if working within Radcliffe-Brown's conception of the rainbow serpent” as a “clearly delineated figure.” The reason for this, as Maddock explains, is that “what are called rainbow serpents belong among a host of fleeting forms in and through which a fundamental conception of the world is expressed” (1978a:1, 5). This world conception he sees as generally cyclical (1978b:115), and moreover subjected to a “metaphysical imperative” as it unites contraries in order to grasp the essence of things (1978a:10). Following this lead, Knight

proposes to see in the Australian rainbow snake the expression of a “logic of alternation, metamorphosis and change, perpetually incorporating within itself its own opposite” (1988:244). The convergence of this view with results of my foregoing analysis is all the more remarkable in that Knight, still reasoning from Australian materials, joins Sophocles in perceiving incest—defined as “a ‘return to the womb’”—and blood-spilling as “merely different aspects of one same sin of excessively stressing blood connection” (1991, 473). Furthermore, Knight defines symbolic death in Australian rites and myths as a “self-dissolution into the corporate identity of ‘the Snake,’ a self-renunciation explicitly likened to an ‘incestuous’ return to ‘the womb’ [. . .] on the model of a woman’s temporary ‘death’ each month” (1991, 465).

There are of course no evolutionist conclusions to draw from this convergence. That analyses on Australian data relating to snake symbolism so precisely correspond to the scheme painstakingly found through the analysis of European fairy tales would seem to imply, rather, that “traditional” worldviews, embodied in both European and other customs and lore, are closer to each other than any of them is to the basic tenets of Western rationalism. One interesting epistemological implication follows. Knight, for one, remarks that because snake symbolism in Australia is associated with the innermost mysteries of secret rites and cults, their meaning is hardly likely to be “immediately recognizable or familiar to those whose belief system is rooted in the scientific rationalism of Western culture” (1988:242). One variant of this problem concerning the study of myths and fairy tales generally is highlighted by Wendy O’Flaherty as she asks, “why is it that people have attempted to apply hard scientific criteria to phenomena that they themselves have defined as soft?” (1984:10).

Indeed it seemed obvious to Stith Thompson that “*before* it can become an object of serious and well-considered study, every branch of knowledge needs to be classified” (1977:413, my emphasis). Likewise, it appears self-evident to Propp that “classification is one of the *first and most important* steps of study” (1968:11, my emphasis). To acknowledge that the “hard” criteria implied in this notion of scientific groundwork cannot but fail to capture such “soft” properties as are essential to the object seems, however, crucial from the point of view of analytical (as opposed to merely descriptive) studies of worldview (Dundes 1995, 230), in which—as this paper strives to suggest—fairy tale analysis is to be included.

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NOTES

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