FAIRY TALES AND TRANSPERSONAL DEVELOPMENT IN LATER LIFE

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Fairy tales contain deep psychological insights, as many commentators have noted (Bettelheim, 1976; Von Franz, 1972, 1974, 1977, 1980; Heuscher, 1974; Luthi, 1967; Zipes, 1983; Rumnley, 1983; Degh, 1981; Tatar, 1981). However, most fairy tales feature young protagonists, and so understandably reflect the psychology of youth—the struggle to become an individual in the real world. The hero or heroine leaves home, seeks true love or a treasure, battles enemies, and ultimately triumphs, living happily ever after.

What happens, we might ask, in that "ever after"—when the Prince turns fifty, or the Princess is widowed? A distinct group of fairy tales answers that question. These stories present mature adults as protagonists, so we might call them, "elder tales." By "fairy tale," of course, I refer to a folktale, rather than a literary work—but not any folktale. Ghost stories, for instance, do not have the happy endings characteristic of fairy tales, and legends or myths claim to be true the way fairy tales do not.

Elder tales are the topic of this paper and in particular what they portray about transpersonal development in the second half of life. If tales of youth focus on personal development, my thesis is that elder tales focus on transpersonal tasks.

The transpersonal focus should not be surprising. The view that spiritual development is the province of later life is common in traditional cultures (Gutmann, 1970; Levinson et al., 1978; Zoja, 1983; Lapidus, 1978; Rohlen, 1978). From the Hindu Laws of Manu (Kakar, 1979; Radakrishnan & Moore, 1978),

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In this essay, I will analyze several prototypical elder tales and discuss the developmental sequence they suggest for later life. In the process, I will relate the folk wisdom of these fairy tales to recent research in the psychology of aging.

ELDER TALES

Older adults appear frequently in fairy tales, but usually in secondary roles. The wicked old man or the wise old woman help or hinder a young person, but it is the youth who carries the drama of the story. Fairy tales which give the leading role to an older adult are distinctly uncommon.

Indeed, after reviewing over 2500 fairy tales from published collections, I found that only about 2% present an older person as the protagonist. By "fairy tale" I mean folktales that do not claim to be true, the way myths and legends do, and which have happy endings, in contrast to ghost stories. I leave the phrase "older person" deliberately vague because fairy tales only broadly indicate the ages of their characters. People are either "young," "old," or not specified. From a few scattered references, it appears that "old" spans a range of ages from 50 upwards. "Young" appears to include people up to their early twenties, while those not specified as either young or old, seem to fall into the middle-aged group. Stories of the latter—an additional 2%—are sufficiently unique to deserve their own discussion elsewhere.

Most elder tales come from Eastern sources—Japan, India, and Arabia, for instance. Western collections, such as the Grimms' rarely feature older adults. Interestingly, Slavic folklore—such as Cossack, Russian, and Croatian fairy tales—depict older persons quite frequently. The Slavic stories resemble tales from Indian and Arabian sources and may result from cross-cultural influences.

The striking emphasis on youth in Western fairy tales may reflect Occidental culture. But it may also arise from distortions imposed by fairy tale collectors. Around the time of the Grimm brothers, Western fairy tales were gathered and rewritten.
specifically for children (Zipes, 1983). Since the intended audience was youthful, collections emphasized young protagonists, and elder tales may have been overlooked. By contrast, non-Western fairy tales were generally recorded later, when more thorough and less editorial methods of collecting folklore were available.

Psychological interpretations of fairy tales attribute symbolic meanings to story characters. The young hero or heroine is almost uniformly interpreted as the ego, while older figures receive various interpretations. Jungians, for instance, construe the aged as archetypes of spirit (Jung, 1943, 1945), the inner Self (Jung, 1943; Whitmont, 1969; Von Franz, 1977, 1980), or nature (Von Franz, 1974; Neumann, 1954). Freudians suggest oedipal figures, or projections of id instincts (Bettelheim, 1976; Scielzo, 1983; Rumnley & Bergman, 1983).

I suggest that the protagonist, whether young or old, represents the ego and individuality. A young protagonist symbolizes the issues of an ego in formation, while an old protagonist reflects the concerns of a mature ego. The symbolism in protagonists of various ages has not been addressed in previous interpretations of fairy tales, I suspect, because elder tales are not common.

I shall now turn to several prominent developmental tasks that appear in elder tales.

THE NUMINOUS ENCOUNTER

Elder tales usually begin with this scenario: an older person lives in great poverty but by chance stumbles upon something supernatural. The encounter initiates transpersonal development. The Japanese story of "Princess Moonlight" is typical (Ozaki, 1970; Mayer, 1985).

An old man and woman were very poor, had no children, and lived on the edge of a bamboo forest. The old man harvested bamboo and made various household implements out of it—spoons, mats, plates and so on. One day, while cutting bamboo in the forest, he noticed a light coming from a giant stalk. He cut it down and found a tiny little girl in it. He and his wife were overjoyed that their prayers for a child had finally been answered. They adopted the little girl and raised her with great love.

The girl was so beautiful and radiant, she was named Princess Moonlight. When she reached maturity, men from all over came to woo her, but she declined their offers. Several princes came calling, but Princess Moonlight sent them on quests so arduous they all gave up. Her father was beside himself, wanting her to get married.
At last word reached the Emperor, and when he saw Princess Moonlight, he fell in love. He proposed marriage but she refused.

Princess Moonlight then revealed that she was actually a celestial being and that she would have to return to the heavens. The old man enlisted the help of the Emperor to prevent the heavenly envoys from taking Princess Moonlight back. At the last minute, the old father saw the foolishness of his resistance. He and his wife then bade farewell to their foster daughter as she ascended into the heavens. From then on, they saw her in the night sky and rejoiced in the knowledge that she had been their adopted daughter.

The story illustrates three major themes that begin most elder tales. The aged protagonist lives in poverty and barrenness. He or she struggles for a living, and lacks children for support or comfort. In the cultures and historical epochs from which these fairy tales spring, childlessness represented a dreadful deprivation. In addition, many of the older characters live on the outskirts of villages or on the edge of a wilderness, as in the story of Princess Moonlight: they are isolated, lacking community or familial support.

Besides the many material losses of later life, the poverty portrayed in elder tales aptly symbolizes the psychological deprivations of the climacteric. Contemporary research documents the high prevalence of depression in the second half of life (Blazer, 1982; Kielholz, 1973). Resigned to loss, many older individuals ask, “What can I expect at my age?” Elder tales answer: a great deal. In the middle of an apparently dismal situation, renewal may occur.

This is the second theme of elder tales-encountering a numinous or supernatural element. In “Princess Moonlight,” the old man miraculously finds a child, symbolic of new life. The transcendent nature of the event is clearly evident: Princess Moonlight is a celestial being, and through her, the old man and woman are linked to the divine realm. In other stories, the old person finds a treasure: gold or jewels serve as the symbol for a transpersonal encounter.

The psychology of aging provides some corroboration for transpersonal experiences in later life. Jung (1930, 1929, 1925), for instance, observed in his clinical work that older adults often have numinous experiences. Munsterberg (1983), in his study of artists, noted that many evolve a “transcendent” quality in their painting, late in life. For some, like Monet, the style is otherworldly, eschewing the normal constraints of material objects. For others, like Goya, a more horrific vision predominates. The numinous, as Otto (1917) observed, need not be beatific.
The phenomenon can also be observed in intellectuals like Whitehead (Chinen, 1985) and Wittgenstein (Labouvie-Vief, 1985). Both began their careers as hard-nosed rationalists, steeped in the empirical science of their time. Then they moved late in life toward metaphysical reflections with mystical overtones.

The third theme of "Princess Moonlight" involves the relatively "passive" way in which the older person encounters the numinous. The old man literally stumbled upon Princess Moonlight in the course of his ordinary work. He did not go on a quest to seek his fortune, as is the rule in youth tales. Nor did he fight for a numinous boon, as young protagonists do. Princess Moonlight simply fell into his life. This "passivity" is typical of elder tales.

SELF-CONFRONTATION

What comes after the numinous encounter in elder tales is self-confrontation and self-reformation. The older adult apprehends some evil in himself and changes as a result. The tale of the "Sparrow's Gift" provides an excellent example (Ozaki, 1970; Sazanami, 1951).

A cross, sharp-tongued old woman lived with her kindly husband. He tended a wild sparrow as a pet, despite the old woman's grumbling about it. In a fit of rage one day, the old woman cut off the tongue of the sparrow, saying the bird made too much noise and ate too much. The poor creature fled. When the old man discovered what happened, he searched for the bird. To his surprise, he found the sparrow well and whole. The bird led him to a beautiful palace in the woods, and assumed her true form—a fairy princess. She thanked the old man for his kindness through the years, and offered him a gift—a big box and a small one. The old man modestly took only the small box, and discovered at home that it was full of gold. His wife complained that he should have also taken the big box because it would have held more treasure.

The next day the old woman sought out the Sparrow Princess and asked for the big box. The Princess gave it to the old woman, who hastened homeward. On the way, the old woman stopped to peek in the box. As soon as she opened it, demons leaped out and attacked her. She fled to her husband, only to have him tell her that the demons were from her own wickedness. The old woman realized how greedy she had been and resolved to reform her life. From that time on she became kinder and more gentle with each passing day.

The reformation of a wicked person is virtually unknown in tales of youth. Its presence in elder tales suggests that self-
confrontation is a developmental task specific to the second half of life.

In youth tales, evil is represented by an external enemy and the evil person is simply punished, the way Cinderella’s step-sisters had their eyes plucked out by doves. If the hero does evil or, in what is the fairy tale equivalent, looks hideous (Luthi, cause is an evil spell from a villain, for which the individual is not held responsible. By contrast, the older protagonist in elder tales recognizes his own evil, and comes to terms with it as the story of the "Tongue-cut Sparrow" nicely illustrates.

The lack of reformation in youth tales reflects two psychological mechanisms typical of youth. The first is the absolute and rigid dichotomy between good and evil that children and adolescents adhere to. The former "split" between good and bad people (Kernberg, 1976; Kohlberg, 1984), unable to make more complex judgments. Adolescents, in turn, gravitate toward extreme categories, based on over-generalized, abstract ideals (Perry, 1968). The story of the sparrow symbolizes this perspective by beginning the drama with a stark contrast between the cross old woman and her kindly husband.

The other psychological mechanism is projection. In youth tales, the protagonist’s evil is projected onto other people—a bad companion, an evil witch, and so on (Heuscher, 1974; Von Franz, 1974). In our story, the old woman initially projected her own evil onto the sparrow, accusing it of being greedy and noisy, which the bird was not, but which in fact the old woman was.

Maturity effects a change in dualism and projection. Recent work in adult cognitive development, for example, notes how mature individuals abandon absolute black and white distinctions for more complex, pragmatic compromises (Sinnott, 1984a, b; Labouvie-Vief & Chandler, 1978; Labouvie-Vief, 1980; Kramer, 1983; King et al., 1983; Chinen et al., 1985). "Splitting" and abstract dualities are replaced by differentiated, integrating distinctions.

With regard to projection, Lung (1930; Whitmont, 1969) observed that older adults frequently reassimilate their youthful projections. Recent longitudinal data confirm the phenomenon (Vaillant, 1976; Vaillant & Milofsky, 1980). The story illustrates the shift: at the end, the old woman acknowledges her own greed and withdraws her projections from the sparrow and the demons. Note that in this-and other stories like it-self-
confrontation occurs after a numinous encounter. This suggests that self-reformation is a psychological stage following trans personal experiences.

The message of elder tales is unexpected. Far from being too rigid for change, older people are the ones who reform, not young ones!

TRANSCENDENCE

The next development in elder tales involves transcendence of a personal viewpoint. Transcendence takes two distinct forms.

First, the older person may shift his concerns from personal ambitions to that of succeeding generations—what Erikson called generativity (1950, 1984). The older person identifies more with the good of society, than with private goals. Bianchi (1984), in particular, discusses this social dimension of spiritual development.

In the second variety of transcendence, an individual adopts a comprehensive perspective which subsumes a personal outlook within a larger philosophical, or spiritual vision. One of the Grimms’ tales illustrates this process (Number 208, Pantheon, 1972).

An old mother sat alone at night, bitter about her life. She had lost her husband and her two little children many years ago, and just that day, her last friend had died. In her loneliness she began to blame God for her suffering. She fell asleep with black thoughts and then awoke in the morning with a start, worried she would be late for morning prayers, as she had never been before. This time she found her church filled with relatives who had died long ago. An aunt then approached the old mother, and pointed to the side of the altar. There a young man dangled from a gallows and another lay sick and impoverished. The aunt told the old woman that the two youths were what her children would have become had they grown up. But God, the aunt went on to explain, had taken them in their innocence, sparing them terrible sin and suffering. The old woman was overcome with emotion and then awoke to find herself at home. She realized how ego-centric her understanding had been, and fell to her knees to thank God for revealing His higher plan. Three days later she died, with great joy in her heart.

Here the old woman transcends private sorrow and anger when given a glimpse of a cosmic perspective—Gad’s viewpoint, as it were. Her subsequent death seems to conflict with the usual fairy tale ending—“and they lived happily ever after.” In this
The sequence of this story again traces out a developmental series. The tale opens with the old woman's loss—the death of her last living friend. Then she had a numinous vision, a glimpse of divine meaning in her life. As a result, she confronted and overcame her bitterness and sorrow. In dying, she then transcended earthly life. Transcendence, the story suggests, is a task that follows loss, the numinous encounter, and self-confrontation.

Lung conceptualized the phenomenon of transcendence in terms of "ego-transcendence" (1930; Edinger, 1972; Whitmont, 1969). After establishing a sturdy ego in the first half of life, the individual proceeds to "dethrone" it, making the ego secondary to the larger, more inclusive system, symbolized by the Self. Recent work in adult psychology has confirmed parallels to this phenomenon of "transcendence." For instance, older adults become more relativistic and contextual in their thinking. Instead of insisting on the truth of personal beliefs, the older individual relativizes them, placing them in a larger social or historical context (Chinen, 1986; Kramer, 1983; Labouvie-Vief, 1985a). In addition, older adults appear to develop a more holistic perspective (Kohlberg, 1973; Kohlberg & Power, 1981; Richards & Commons, 1984; Chinen et al., 1985; Linn & Siegel, 1984; Koplowitz, 1984; Cook, 1985). They tend to think in terms of inclusive systems, rather than personalized particulars.

The transcendence of individual concerns may account for an unexpected phenomenon in elder tales: although death is usually thought of as the ultimate loss, it is rare for it to be a problem in elder tales. Where fear of death occurs, the protagonist is usually identified as middle-aged, and recent research corroborates the point (Gould, 1978).

SEEING THROUGH ILLUSION

The next developmental stage in elder tales involves the ability to see through illusions. That motif is exemplified by the Croatian story of "The Old Mother-in-law" (Berlic-Mazuranic, 1924).

An old woman's son found a snake in an enchanted woods, which became a beautiful woman before his eyes. He fell in love with the maiden and married her. His mother suspected that the woman
was a snake, so the young wife made life hard for the mother-in-law. The son did not intervene, so bewitched was he. The old woman endured her burden for some time but finally cried out to God.

A young woman then appeared and gave the old mother a bundle of kindling. When the old woman used the kindling, elves leaped out of the fire, dancing and singing. Delighted by the sight, the old woman joined their festivities but then remembered her son and sat down sadly. After learning of her plight, the elves suggested a solution. At a party with all the village present, the old woman brought out baby magpies. Because snakes love to eat magpie chicks, the young wife immediately stuck out her serpent's tongue. The villagers fled in horror, but the old woman's son refused to believe what he had seen. He angrily threw his mother out of the house and into the winter night.

The elves took the old mother to the lord of the enchanted forest. The sorcerer offered the old mother a chance to go back to her youth, and live forever in the happiest period of her life. Just as she was about to accept, the old mother asked what would happen to her son. The sorcerer said that she would not remember him because she would return to the time before she was married. The old woman then sadly declined the magic offer, saying she would rather live her life of sorrow, knowing who she was and remembering her son. At that moment, the enchantment of the forest was broken. As the fairy tale explains it, the old woman had chosen her own life of sorrow to all the joys of the world and this broke all spells. The young woman turned back into a snake, the son realized his terrible sin and begged his mother for forgiveness. He then married a real woman from the village and they all lived happily ever after.

This story is remarkably rich in many ways: it portrays a case of elder abuse, for one-only now being acknowledged as a major social problem. However, I shall focus on one theme only—illusion and how the old woman rejected it. There are three points about this.

First, the old mother chose her own real life, sorrowful though it was, over joyful illusion. She thus demonstrates ego-integrity, in Erikson's sense—the affirmation of one's own life as it was and is (Erikson, 1950, 1984). The story also specifically notes the old woman rejected a chance to live in the past. This is a perceptive comment on the temptation many old people wrestle with—reminiscing about the past, rather than coping with the present (Lieberman & Tobin, 1983; Butler, 1963; Revere & Tobin, 1980).

Second, the old woman was never deceived by the young wife's magic, while her son was. This difference symbolizes, I suggest, the importance of illusion to youth. Whether they be about
romance, political ideals, or career ambitions, dreams inspire young adults and motivate them. Maturity ideally brings greater realism (Whitmont, 1969; Levinson et al., 1978; Gould, 1978).

Third, when the old woman chose not to live in illusion, she broke the enchantment of the whole forest. This recalls the image of defeating maya in the Hindu and Buddhist traditions, a task that the laws of Manu assign to the third quarter of life (Kakar, 1979; Radakrishnan & Moore, 1957). In that period, the older person was to leave his home and live alone in the forest, practicing yoga, meditation and various asceticisms, in order to recognize the illusory nature of the material world. This is precisely what the old mother-in-law did—she rejected the magic offer from the lord of enchantment and thus destroyed his power of illusion. A nineteenth-century Croatian fairy taleEchoes the spiritual concerns of ancient India!

EMANCIPATED MATURITY

After confronting personal evil and transcending private ambitions, the older person in elder tales enters a unique state of innocence. An excellent example of this theme comes from the tale of the "Old Man Who Lost His Wen" (Ozaki, 1970; Mayer, 1984).

An old man suffered from a large wen, or lump, on his face as an adult. After years of fruitless efforts to rid himself of it, he resigned himself to the wen, and even joked about it. One day he went into the forest to cut some wood. A storm arose and forced him to take refuge in a hollowed-out tree. After the rain stopped, a group of demons appeared and gathered right in front of the old man's hiding place. In terror he watched the demons dance and sing, but the old man had always loved dancing, and so he soon enjoyed the spectacle. The demons were poor dancers, and their king quickly became bored. When the demon king asked if there was anybody else who wanted to dance, the old man was tempted to reveal himself. But he feared the demons might devour him if he did.

Finally, the old man's love of dancing won out, and the old man emerged from his hiding place. He danced like never before, thoroughly enjoying himself. The demon king appreciated the old man's dancing so much, he insisted the man return the next day. To insure the man would comply, the demon decided to keep some guarantee, and plucked the old man's wen off, thinking it a valuable possession. The old man returned home overjoyed.

The old man had a greedy neighbor, who also suffered from a wen, but who refused to accept the deformity. So when the neighbor heard how the old man lost his wen, the neighbor decided to go and
dance for the demons, too. The neighbor met the demons the next day and danced. But he had never liked dancing, and performed carelessly. In anger, the demon king told the neighbor to go away, and threw the wen he had kept from the day before. The wen stuck on the man's face, so he ended up with two lumps!

This story dramatically contrasts the old man with his neighbor. The old man danced for the demons because he loved to dance, acting spontaneously, almost the way a child plays. The old man also trusted the demons, despite their horrifying appearance. He exhibited an innocent faith typical more of children than grown-ups. The old man's reward was to lose his wen and to regain the appearance he had as a child, unblemished and without deformity—his "original face," as it were. I suggest that the story symbolizes the advent of what we might call "emancipated maturity." Freed from conventions and inhibitions, the individual enters a state that resembles the innocence and spontaneity we attribute to children.

The old man's neighbor, by contrast, went to the demons with a conscious plan. He did not enjoy dancing, and only wanted to get rid of his wen. He ended up offending the demons and getting two lumps! The wens can be interpreted as the distortions the ego imposes upon an originally pure self-fears, desires, conceits, plans, and deceptions.

I should emphasize that the old man regained an innocence that resembles the child's, but he did not become a child again. When he danced, he did so with concentration and skill, as the original story specifically notes. He was not an inexperienced child, but a mature adult. Moreover, the old man returned to a form of innocence, after living in the world. He and older protagonists like him—contrasts with the naïve young hero or heroine who has not yet gone into the world.

The story of the old man traces out a developmental sequence. He starts out suffering from a wen—and this deformity is analogous to the poverty that elder tales begin with. In a small but highly perceptive, symbolic detail, the story notes that the old man had reconciled himself to his wen. His acceptance implies two things. First he transcended personal vanity, and second, he accepted his own ugliness—and by extension, his own evil. So this story begins where other elder tales leave off—after self-confrontation and transcendence.

When the old man meets the demons in the forest, he does not reject them as evil creatures, as would be the rule in youth tales. Instead he accepts them, and even dances with them! In effect, he sees through the frightening appearance of the demons—piercing the illusion of a dichotomy between good and bad.
The story thus suggests that emancipated maturity comes after self-confrontation, transcendence and the ability to see through illusions. At this level of development, the mature individual can put aside conscious plans, inhibitions, disturbing emotions, or apparently horrible circumstances, and act spontaneously from an inner center.

The emancipated maturity portrayed in elder tales can be found in the writings of a few aged persons, as discussed elsewhere (Grotjahn, 1980; Chinen, 1984a, b). This stage of development is uncommon, but that is not surprising: in general the highest levels of psychological development are extremely rare (Cook, 1985; Kohlberg & Ryncarz, 1985).

Childlike innocence is a common metaphor for spiritual illumination (Von Franz, 1977; Heuscher, 1974). In particular, the emancipated maturity shares many similarities with enlightenment (Hixon, 1978; Scharfstein, 1973). In the story, for instance, the old man did something apparently foolish—dancing with demons. The oddity recalls the outrageous antics of Zen masters (Kubose, 1973; Reps, 1975). Moreover, in accepting the demons, the old man demonstrated an attitude in which good and evil, ugly and beautiful were the same to him—a central feature of Zen illumination (Shibayama, 1970; Suzuki, 1970, 1956; Kapleau, 1965). I outline elsewhere a more detailed, logical analysis of the similarity between enlightenment and the innocent integrity of late life (Chinen, 1984a, b; 1985). I suggest that elder tales portray illumination as an ideal development of later life.

MEDIATION WITH THE NUMINOUS

At peace with himself and the transpersonal, the older person becomes uniquely qualified to mediate between the numinous realm and the mundane one. The story of the "Old Fisherman and the Genie" is instructive here, from the *1001 Arabian Nights* (Burton, 1978).

While fishing, an old man found a mysterious flask. Upon opening it, a dreadful genie emerged who threatened to kill the fisherman. The genie explained that he had been imprisoned in the bottle for his misdeeds. In the first few centuries of his confinement, the genie resolved to reward whoever released him. But nobody did. In the next few centuries he waxed rageful and promised to kill whomever liberated him. The old man could not dissuade the genie to spare his life, but finally tried a ruse. He questioned whether the genie really had been in the bottle, and tricked the vain monster into
returning to the flask. The old man immediately stopped it up again.

The genie then offered great rewards if the fisherman would release him, but the old man did not fall for the temptation. Instead he proceeded to converse with the genie and the two exchanged stories at length. Finally the genie offered to swear an oath upon the Terrible Name of the Most High not to harm the old man. At this point the old man decided to trust the genie and released him. When the genie reappeared in his full majesty, the old man was terrified and counted himself lost. But the genie led the old fisherman to a secret lake and instructed him to fish there and give the catch to the Sultan.

The old man did so, presenting four beautiful fishes in four different colors to the Sultan. The monarch rewarded the old man richly. However, the fish provoked a series of magical events, prompting the Sultan to ask the fisherman where the fishes came from. The Sultan then became involved in an adventure which resulted in the disenchantment of an entire kingdom: the lake was actually a city, and the fishes, the citizens. The story ends with the Sultan marrying the fisherman's eldest daughter and the Prince of the newly freed land marrying the fisherman's younger daughter. They all then live happily ever after.

There are three points that are important about this story. First, the old man mediated between transpersonal and personal dimensions. The story begins with the old man contacting numinous powers in the form of the genie, and then the magical lake. The latter is particularly significant. Surrounded by four identical mountains, and containing four kinds of fish in the primary colors, the lake represents a mandala, and symbolizes a numinous center. But the story does not stop here.

The fisherman goes on to give four magical fish to the Sultan and this prompts the Sultan on his adventure. The Sultan symbolizes the mundane world. Entangled with material affairs, the Sultan cannot himself make contact with the numinous and depends upon the old fisherman for that function. Without material possessions or obligations, the fisherman is free to contact the numinous.

Note that the old man is not the direct beneficiary of the whole drama—he is rewarded, to be sure, but his daughters gain even more, marrying the Sultan and Prince—and society gains the most. An entire kingdom is liberated! The story provides another instance of Erikson's notion of generativity as a development of later life. But the story explicitly places the
event in a transpersonal context. The aged person mediates between this world and the next, to the benefit of this.

Older persons habitually play the role of mediator in fairy tales of youths: the old person offers magical help to a young protagonist. How the old person is able to do that is rarely revealed in youth tales. Elder tales suggest that the process is a developmental one.

In particular, mediation with the divine follows emancipated maturity. This is the second point of the story. After having been threatened with death by the genie, the fisherman does not throw the flask back into the sea, like a cautious adult would, but talks with the spirit. Nor does the fisherman bargain, the way a rational adult might, specifying such and such a reward, and so on. Instead, in the original version, the two tell each other fairy tales! Finally the fisherman releases the genie, despite the genie's previous murderous behavior. The apparent foolishness of the decision is striking. The fisherman's trust reflects a deep and innocent faith-believing that the monster would keep his word, because he made an oath on the Name of God.

However, the fisherman was no mere child, helplessly overwhelmed by the genie and requiring supernatural rescue, like young heros usually do. The old man cleverly thought his way out of the situation. The point is important. The numinous dimension is frequently not benign (Otto, 1917; Neumann, 1954; Edinger, 1972) and a sturdy ego is needed to survive an encounter with it. Extensive personal development must precede transpersonal progress (Wilber, 1984a, b). Ideally, years of experience in the world provide this ego development, illustrated by the cunning and courage the old man displayed.

In putting mediation with the numinous after emancipated maturity, this story and others like it emphasize an important point. Personal illumination and innocence are not the ultimate goals of development: the illumination of the world is. Private salvation is not the endpoint-rather the emancipation of the world.

The last point the fisherman's story offers is a telling one. The tale illustrates how the psychology of later life-and transpersonal development-can be overlooked. Bettelheim (1976) interpreted the same story in terms of children's development, arguing that the tale teaches children how they can use cleverness to control their own rage. But Bettelheim used a truncated version of the tale which ends with the fisherman tricking the genie back into the bottle and throwing the flask
into the ocean. Bettelheim missed the last half of the story, and thus the psychology of the last half of life.

RETURN AND TRANSFIGURATION

The final theme in elder tales involves a unique developmental phenomenon—retracing earlier psychological stages, going backwards. This might appear to be regression, were it not for a spiritual transformation that is the outcome. The Japanese tale of the "Old Man and His Dog" illustrates the motif quite well (Ozaki, 1970; Mayer, 1984; Sazanami, 1951).

Once upon a time, a little white dog walked by the house of a childless couple. The old man and woman adopted the dog as a pet, caring for him as they would a child. The dog one day dug in the yard and led the old man there. When the old man started to help his dog, he discovered a cache of gold coins!

The old man had a greedy, wicked neighbor who had seen everything. The neighbor borrowed the clever dog and forced him to hunt for treasure. But the wicked old man only dug up wastes. In anger, he killed the dog and buried him beneath a tree.

The kind old man was deeply grieved. Not wishing to disturb his pet's burial place, the old man asked his neighbor for the tree under which his dog was buried and made a mortar out of the wood. He and his wife then pounded rice cakes in the mortar, in memory of their dear pet. To their surprise, the mortar produced rice cakes without requiring any rice! The wicked neighbor saw all this again, and borrowed the mortar. But it produced only stinking wastes for him, so he burned it. The old man retrieved the ashes.

One day in winter, some of the ashes accidentally blew up into a bare cherry tree. Immediately the tree blossomed. The astounded old man discovered that whenever he threw the ashes on a tree, flowers bloomed. Soon everybody flocked to his garden. Word reached the ear of a great lord who invited the old man to make the palace garden bloom. When the old man did so, the lord rewarded him richly, granting him the title, "The Old Man Who Makes Withered Trees Flower." The wicked neighbor wanted a reward, too, so he paraded around the city, carrying a basket of the ashes. The lord invited him to the palace, but when the wicked neighbor threw ashes everywhere, nothing happened, except that the nobles got quite dirty. The wicked man was promptly thrown in prison.

This fairy tale involves a highly symbolic sequence of objects. Here I shall use a psychoanalytic framework for interpretation. The old couple lack a child. Symbolic of genital sexuality. They settle for a dog, with its association as a powerful pet to phallic issues. Gold appears next, with its psychoanalytic associations to feces and anal issues. (The fact that the neighbor finds wastes at this point in the story highlights the anal theme.) The old man then makes a mortar—s—one that provides infinite food. It is
a transparent symbol for oral gratification. In essence, the old man retraces early psychosexual stages, moving backwards towards progressively more basic stages. But he does not end up in an infantile state, rather with something new—the ashes that transfigure dead trees. The succession suggests that the old man did not merely regress, as many older persons do, in what has been called the "de Capo" effect in gerontology, but that he transformed earlier developmental steps into a higher sort of illumination. The sequence portrayed in this story—and others like it—inscribes a circle: the end is the beginning, transfigured.

The illumination of earlier or "deeper" levels of experience in later life finds parallels in three lines of inquiry. First is adult cognitive psychology. Initial work suggested that older individuals "regress" in problem solving, for instance, using concrete operations instead of abstract formal thinking (Labouvie-Vief, 1984, 1985a; Labouvie-Vief & Chandler, 1978). More careful contemporary work indicates that mature adults consciously use "more primitive" approaches to problem solving, fitting their strategies to the pragmatic situation (Sinnott, 1983, 1984a). They bring explicit awareness to mental operations that were previously unconscious or taken for granted (Pascual-Leone, 1984).

The second line of evidence comes from psychoanalysts who have worked with older individuals (Baker & Wheelwright, 1982; Shainess, 1979; Zinberg, 1964). Many comment on an apparent decrease in repression: the older individual seems to have freer access to unconscious material, bringing clearer consciousness to early levels of experience.

Thirdly, the illumination of earlier developmental levels is described as an important element in Eastern meditative disciplines (Wilber, 1984; Brown & Engler, 1980; Engler, 1984). In order to break with maya, the individual must descend to the root of attachment, buried deep within experience, and arising early in life. Meditative disciplines provide concerted means of achieving this end. What elder tales suggest is that regression, emancipation and transfiguration may be an ideal outcome of the natural process of aging.

Transfiguration also occurs in youth tales, but the process differs dramatically from elder tales. The young hero or heroine seeks a numinous object in a distant land—for example, searching for the Holy Grail, or seeking one's true love. Youth braves many perils and must develop new talents and skills in order to cope. The symbols in youth tales reflect a progression through the psychosexual stages, from earlier to more mature levels.
A COMPOSITE CYCLE

The themes I have discussed fall into a natural succession, as I have intimated. The succession outlines a developmental sequence of tasks for later life. The Italian fairy tale of the "Shining Fish" illustrates the cycle (Calvino, 1956).

An old man lived in poverty with his wife. He went everyday to gather firewood in the forest, selling his load to the villagers. One day he met a stranger in the forest who told the startled old man that he knew all about the latter's trials. The stranger gave the poor man a bag full of gold. Astounded and elated the old man hurried home and hid the gold under a pile of manure, not telling his wife for fear she would waste the money. The next day he found to his horror that his wife sold the manure, ignorant about the gold, in order to buy food for them!

Angry at himself, the old man went back to the forest to gather firewood. To his surprise he ran into the same stranger who proceeded to give him another bag of gold. The unbelieving old man hastened home and hid his new treasure under the ashes in his fireplace again not telling his wife for fear she would squander the money.

The old man awoke the next morning to discover that his wife had sold the ashes to get food for that day. Desolate now, the old man returned to the forest and encountered the stranger once again. This time the stranger declared that he would not give the old man any gold since the poor man couldn't keep it! Instead the stranger offered the old man a sack full of frogs and instructed him to buy a fish after selling the frogs in the village. Mortified by his previous greed, tile old man obeyed the stranger's odd request and returned home with a large fish.

The old man hung the fish outside of their house from the rafters. It stormed that night and the next day the old man and woman found a group of young fishermen gathered outside their cottage. The fishermen thanked the old Ulan for helping them find their way back to port the night before, when they were caught at sea by the storm. The old man then saw that his fish, hanging outside, glowed with such a bright light that it could be seen for miles around. From that day, the old man put the Shining Fish outside to guide the young fishermen, and they shared their catch with him and his wife. Then everybody lived happily ever after.

The story begins with the old man in a state of poverty and deprivation. This is the usual setting of elder tales, and aptly symbolic of the stresses of later life.

The old man then encounters a stranger who is clearly a numinous being—possessed of inexplicable knowledge, wealth, and sure timing. The meeting was not one the old man sought: the stranger came to him. This numinous encounter occurring in the older person's ordinary routine constitutes the second phase of development.
The old man next receives a bag of gold, symbolizing the irruption of a transpersonal dimension in his ordinary life. But the old man tries to keep the treasure for himself, not even telling his wife. As a result, the old man loses the once, but twice. Finally the stranger scolds the old man and this forces the old woodcutter to confront his own greed and mistrust—the unsavory, shadowy elements of himself. Self-confrontation and reformation comprise the third phase in elder tales—a development prompted by a supernatural agency. This suggests that the ego will not accept its own evil and limitation until compelled to do so by a "higher power."

After getting the fish, the old man hung it outside of his house, open for anybody to see—or steal. This act reflects how the old man transcended his previous fears of having his gifts stolen, and put greed behind him. In hanging the fish outside, the old man symbolically indicates he is willing to offer it to the world. This transcendence of egocentric concerns comprises a fourth developmental phase in elder tales.

Leaving the fish outside surely seems rather foolish. Indeed, it is almost childlike in its naivete. The old man trusts that nobody will steal his fish, whether man, bird or cat! This spirit of emancipated maturity is the fifth phase in elder tales.

The ordinary fish then becomes a shining beacon and saves the lives of the young fishermen. By hanging the fish outside, the old man functions as a mediator between the numinous and the mundane. The Shining Fish redounds not just to his benefit, but to that of the succeeding generation—the sixth developmental step. The story rather concretely illustrates the message that the endpoint is the illumination of the worldly order.

The story also portrays a regression to and transfiguration of earlier levels of consciousness. The old man is given, in sequence, gold, frogs and then the fish, which in turn becomes a miraculous light. Gold can be interpreted here less in its psychosexual associations, than as a symbol for consciousness and material wealth—the epitome of civilization (Von Franz, 1970, 1980). Frogs appear next, with their common association as an intermediary between conscious and unconscious (Von Franz, 1970, 1972). They are, after all, amphibians who arose from fishes, even retaining their fishlike nature as tadpoles. Frogs also introduce the theme of transfiguration, because they undergo radical transmutation from tadpole to frog. Indeed, they are frequently symbols of rebirth, in such disparate cultures as the Tibetan (Hyde-Chambers & Hyde-Chambers, 1981) and Italian (Miller, 1976).
The fish is the last gift and offers a good symbol of the unconscious—the earliest developmental level (Neumann, 1954). However, the Fish is also a long-familiar symbol for Christ, an association that would be familiar to the Italian and presumably Catholic story-tellers. In addition, the Fish is hung from the rafters, a symbolic analogy with crucifixion. It is then the Fish shines mysteriously, transformed into a numinous object. A symbol of a "primitive" developmental stage becomes one for ultimate spiritual transfiguration. The story depicts a circular process of development in which the last becomes the first, uniting the highest with the lowest.

CONCLUSION

This paper can only hint at the riches that elder tales offer. Fairy tales are repositories of a great many insights into human development, but psychologists have focussed on stories of youth, and issues of personal development. The oversight no doubt reflects the great cultural stress on children and individuality, youth and ego. Within the treasury of folklore, though, rarer gems await—fairy tales about older adults, commenting on the tasks and phases of transpersonal development.

According to familiar fairy tales, the Prince and Princess struggle mightily, find each other, marry, and live happily ever after. And surely true love and one's own kingdom represent the highest ideals of the individual ego. But much more remains of life in the "ever after"—and perhaps the most important part: numinous experiences, self-reformation, transcendence, seeing-through illusions, emancipated maturity, mediation with the transpersonal, and the transfiguration of early experience.

Elder tales speak to older adults. This may seem paradoxical or even foolish. And yet the fairy tale genre may be uniquely appropriate for the insights. If spiritual innocence is the ideal of late life, then fairy tales are a fitting mode of communication. The medium matches the message. The magic of childhood returns late in life: fantasy becomes spiritual reality, and the beginning, the end, transfigured and illuminated, for self and world.

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