

# MYSTIC LIGHT

## *Mythology and Esoteric Truths*

### TECHNIQUES OF MYTHOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

**M**YTHS ARE METAPHORS which tell us about cosmic laws and what we need to do to attain life's goals. The creators of myths are wise people who are trying to convey some aspect of Truth to humanity.

Why do the creators of myths use metaphors instead of telling us about Truth directly? There are several reasons. One is that our language, which deals with things which we know about, may be inadequate for talking about things which are beyond the realm of everyday experience (such as God and the spiritual worlds and the path of evolution). Another reason is that our minds may not be adequate to contain the full reality (such as the cycles of evolution in their full magnitude). Another reason is that different people have different degrees of readiness for various Truths, and myths may be simultaneously read at various levels.

When people read myths, different people may come up with different interpretations. Some people ask whether the author meant for the myth to be interpreted in one way or another. To gain perspective on this issue, consider a law developed by Isaac Newton: "The acceleration of a rigid object equals the net force acting on the object divided by the mass of the object." This is a basic pattern of nature which can be applied in many situations, whether or not Newton used it in some particular situation. Likewise, myths give basic patterns which can be applied in many ways and given many interpretations, whether the creator of the

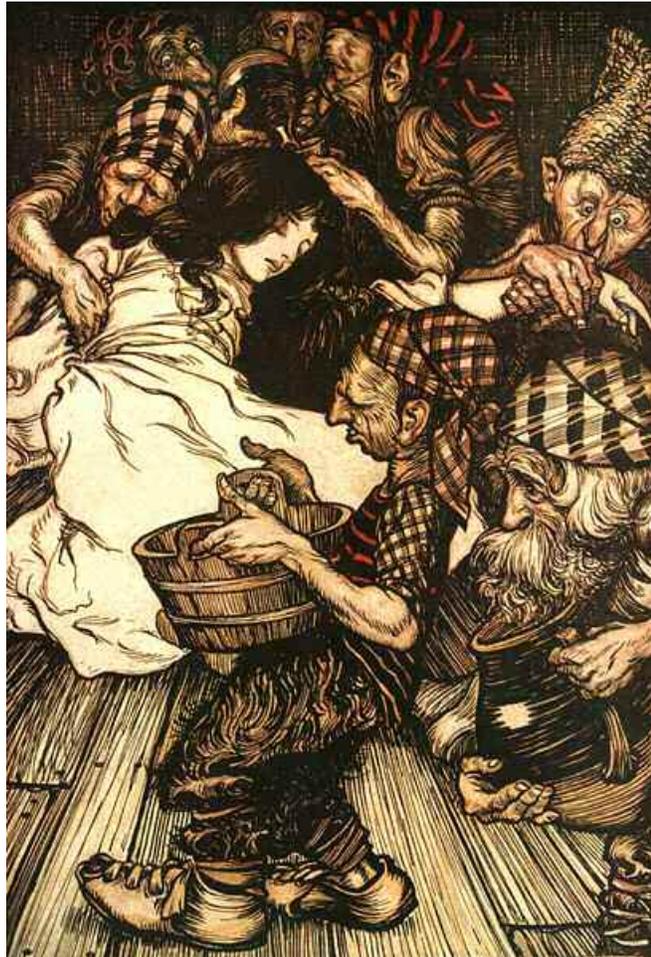


Illustration for Grimm's Snow White by Arthur Rackham, Dover Publications, Inc.

myth had a given interpretation in mind or not.

Some of the possible approaches to mythological interpretation are the following: a) One may read myths simply as good stories, which tell how people deal with various situations and how they become heroes or villains. b) One may seek to determine what each symbol in the myths represent, and thus come up with a sort of dictionary of meanings of symbols. However, just as words may have multiple meanings, so also the symbols in myths may have multiple possible meanings. Which meaning should be used depends on the context. For example, in western myths, dragons are often the fierce, greedy and wicked; whereas in Eastern myths they are often kind and helpful. The nature of the dragon will influence its interpreta-

tion. c) If one knows the patterns of Cosmic Laws and the path of evolution, then one can look for these patterns in the myths. If a myth presents a pattern which is the same as some Cosmic Law or some aspect of the path of evolution, then that Cosmic Law or aspect of the path of evolution may be taken as the interpretation of that myth.

Note that in myths all the characters are qualities within each of us. We contain both prince and princess (regardless of whether we are in male or female bodies at the present). Also the witches and magicians and dragons may function within us.

Many myths were part of oral tradition for some time before they were written down. As the stories were told and retold, the basic structure may have been maintained, but each individual story teller may have added various little details to make the story more dramatic. Thus, some of the details in some myths are just for giving color to the stories and are not of any great cosmic significance.

#### THE MYSTIC MARRIAGE IN MYTHOLOGY

On the path of evolution, we started out united with God and had All-consciousness. We became enclosed in physical bodies which cut us off from the All-consciousness but enabled us to see ourselves and thus to gain self-consciousness. We then must regain the All-consciousness and unite it with the self-consciousness.

A typical myth which represents this path portrays the All-consciousness as a princess or other female figure, and the self-consciousness as a prince or other male figure. The surrounding of the self-consciousness by bodies may be represented by the prince being encased in an animal body (such as a frog, donkey, lion, bear, etc.), or by the princess being encased in an animal body. Note that whether the prince or the princess is encased, the two are separated from each other. The separation of the All-consciousness from the self-consciousness may also be represented by the princess being encased in a tower without any doors, or encircled with a wall of flame, or put to sleep in a castle surrounded by briars, or put to sleep in a glass coffin, etc. In the end, either the prince finds the princess or the princess finds the prince, and they marry, which represents the unification of the

self-consciousness with the All-consciousness.

In *The Frog Prince* (Grimm Fairy Tales), the frog eventually turns into a prince and marries the princess.

In *The Miller Boy and His Cat* (Grimm Fairy Tales), the princess is encased in a cat's body. The Miller Boy breaks the spell and marries the princess.

In *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* (Grimm Fairy Tales), Snow White was put to sleep by eating a poisoned apple, and because she appeared to be dead, the dwarves put her in a glass coffin. But when a prince took the coffin, the jogging of the coffin loosened the piece of poisoned apple from her throat and she awoke. Then she married the prince.

In *Rapunsel* (Grimm Fairy Tales), Rapunsel was imprisoned by a witch in a tower without doors. Eventually the prince gained access to the tower, but then the witch put Rapunsel in a forest. The prince had to wander for some time more before he found her.

#### THE DWELLER ON THE THRESHOLD IN MYTHOLOGY

The Dweller on the Threshold is the being which guards the passage from the ordinary world of consciousness into the spiritual worlds. When we have self-consciousness but not All-consciousness, we do not see the future. Thus, the Recording Angels are able to put our destiny in front of us and we run into it because we do not know it is there. When, however, the self unites with the All-consciousness, then the future can be seen. Then, anything that the Recording Angels put in front of us could be seen ahead of time and sidestepped if we so chose. So at that point it is necessary for us to take charge of our own destiny. The Dweller on the Threshold consists of all unredeemed debts, and meeting it successfully involves taking full responsibility for its redemption.

A typical mythological pattern representing the Dweller on the Threshold involves a dragon (the Dweller) who guards some gold (All-consciousness) and must be conquered by the hero (self-consciousness) if the gold is to be obtained. Sometimes the dragon (Dweller) has been ravaging the population of some region and as appeasement periodically requires a maiden (All-consciousness) to be tied up by the seashore so that

he can come and devour her. Of course, any hero (self-consciousness) who rescues such a maiden may marry her (the Mystic Marriage of the self with the All). Sometimes the Dweller is represented as a witch or wizard to whom a debt is owed and who takes and hides a child (All-consciousness) in payment for the debt.

An example of a myth in which the Dweller is represented as a dragon is the Greek Myth of Perseus and Andromeda. Queen Cassiopeia claimed that her daughter, Andromeda, was more beautiful than the daughters of the sea god, Poseidon. In payment for this affront, Andromeda (All-consciousness) was chained to a rock by the sea (separated from the rest of humanity) so a dragon (the Dweller) could eat her (imprison her within himself). Perseus (the self-consciousness) appeared, killed the dragon (took charge of the debts), and married Andromeda (the self became unified with the All).

In the story of Jonah and the Whale, the Lord asked Jonah (the self-consciousness) to go to Nineveh and prophesy its destruction, but Jonah did not feel capable of doing so. When Jonah got in a boat to flee from Nineveh, a big storm arose which was caused by Jonah's guilt. The storm is representing Jonah's unpaid debts of destiny (the Dweller on the Threshold). When Jonah admits his responsibility and is thrown into the sea, the storm abates (the Dweller is conquered). Jonah is swallowed by a whale (his body is entombed while his spirit receives initiation), and later the whale deposits Jonah on dry land (the spirit returns to the physical body). Jonah is then able to prophesy to Nineveh that it will be destroyed (the initiate has prophetic power of his own, and is no longer simply doing what others have told him).

In the story of *Jorinda and Joringel* (Grimm Fairy Tales), the maiden, Jorinda, and the young man, Joringel, are already engaged at the beginning of the story. We are destined to unite our self with the All from the start of evolution. One day they are wandering in a forest. The forest represents our state in physical manifestation where time vision is limited and we cannot see very far ahead and thus tend to wander. They happen to enter the territory of a witch, who turns Jorinda



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*A witch ( Dweller), who takes the form of an owl, turns Jorinda (All-Consciousness) into a nightingale and puts it into a cage (separates it from Joringel or self-consciousness).*

(All-consciousness) into a bird and puts her in a cage. The witch is the Dweller on the Threshold who keeps the All-consciousness separated from the self-consciousness. Joringel eventually finds how to break the witch's spell, does so, and then marries Jorinda (the Mystic Marriage occurs).

In the story *The Frog Prince* (Grimm Fairy Tales), the self is encased in a frog's body. The frog seeks the princess (All-consciousness) and wants to sit, eat, sleep and play with her. The Threshold is met when the princess throws the frog against the wall. This instantaneously turns the frog into a prince. Then the prince and princess marry (the self is united with the All).

In *The Wizard of Earthsea* by Ursula LeGuin, the hero, Ged, is haunted by a shadow which he released when he caused a rift in the separation between the worlds of the living and the dead. He

searches for the name of the shadow because when he can name it he will be able to conquer it. In the end, he finds that the name of the shadow is, in fact, his own name. The shadow here is the Dweller on the Threshold.

The story of *The Ring of the Niebelung*, by Richard Wagner, is long and complicated, with almost every detail having symbolical significance. But the part that concerns the Dweller on the Threshold is the meeting of Siegfried (the self-consciousness) with the Dragon (the Dweller on the Threshold). The Dragon has the ring, which symbolizes the circle which the self draws around itself in order to become aware of itself, and its powers to will and to create. When Siegfried conquers the dragon, he obtains the ring and gives it to Brunhilde (Truth or All-consciousness). Thus, he unifies the self (ring) and the All (Brunhilde).

#### EVOLUTIONARY CYCLES IN MYTHOLOGY

The path from All-consciousness to self-consciousness, to unification of the All-consciousness with self-consciousness is not a straight path. It contains many cycles. These cycles are necessary because when we are in physical manifestation we have self-consciousness but tend to lose our All-consciousness. When we are out of physical manifestation we gain in All-consciousness but tend to lose our self-consciousness. As we cycle back and forth, each time we come into self-consciousness we carry a little more of the All-consciousness with us, and each time we return to the All-consciousness we carry a little more of the self-consciousness with us. Thus we move toward unification of the self-consciousness and the All-consciousness. These cycles occur as our spirits go in and out of manifestation in our life-death cycles, and also on a daily basis in our wake-sleep cycles.

In *The Twelve Dancing Princesses* (Grimm Fairy Tales), the soldier had three days in which to investigate where the princesses were dancing at night. In *Rumpelstiltskin* (Grimm Fairy Tales), the queen had three days to guess Rumpelstiltskin's name.

In Greek mythology, Sisyphus was condemned by the gods to roll a rock up a hill over and over, the rock rolling down again each time it got to the top. His predicament may be similar to human Ego who

comes to earth and does the work required to gather the possessions needed to make life comfortable and then dies and loses all the things it has gathered and must start all over again in its next lifetime. But, hopefully, both Sisyphus and humanity are gaining something of permanent value in all their cycles.

The mythical Phoenix is a bird who lives for a period of time (somewhere between 500 and 1460 years) in a sorrowless land. Then it returns to Phoenicia, where it builds a nest. At sunrise the nest is set on fire by the sun's first rays. In the ashes remains a small white worm which in three days grows to a new Phoenix, who arises and returns to its home in paradise. Then the process is repeated over again. This appears to be similar to the life-death cycle of humans.

A Sufi Story which symbolically represents the cycles involved in a number of lifetimes is *Fatima the Spinner and the Tent* (Idries Shah, *Tales of the Dervishes*, Teaching Stories of the Sufi Masters Over the Past Thousand Years, Dutton, 1970). In this story a girl, Fatima, is born into a family who are spinners, and she learns that trade. Then she goes on a trip in a boat which is shipwrecked at sea. She is washed up on shore, and the trauma of her experience makes her forget most of her former life. She is taken in by some cloth makers, who teach her their trade. Then she is kidnapped by some slave traders and sold to one who makes masts for ships. She learns that trade. Then, trading in a ship off the coast of China, she is again shipwrecked and cast upon shore.

In China there was a legend that some day a foreigner would come who could make a tent. So when she is washed ashore, she is taken to the king and asked to make a tent. She asks for rope, stout cloth, and poles of the type she needs, but none are to be had. So, she spins strong rope, weaves stout cloth and makes stout tent poles. These she puts together into a tent. As a reward she is given a handsome prince to marry. The tent which she makes may be taken as analogous to the Golden Wedding Garment (a soul body which is capable of being conscious in the spiritual worlds) which each of us makes over many lives in preparation for the Mystic Marriage. (Continued) □

—Elsa Glover