

Fairy Tale Flip Self-Discovery Journal

Chapter 2/Week Five



The Wild Swans

Far, far away where the swallows fly when we have winter, there lived a King who had eleven sons and one daughter, Elisa. The eleven brothers, Princes all, each went to school with a star at his breast and a sword at his side. They wrote with pencils of diamond upon golden slates, and could say their lesson by heart just as easily as they could read it from the book. You could tell at a glance how princely they were. Their sister, Elisa, sat on a little footstool of flawless glass. She had a picture book that had cost half a kingdom. Oh, the children had a very fine time, but it did not last forever.

Most of us were raised on fairy tales. They were the models of how we thought the world worked and taught us our role in that world. The clarity of the profiles of the archetypes and the unrelenting end-goal of the plots made our lives seem easier, as from them we believed the world was black and white, that injustice was usually vanquished, that the males ruled the kingdoms kindly and justly, and that women - who were not blatantly evil - were kind, pliant and weak.

Now, can you read the opening of the gorgeous tale Hans Cristian Andersen wrote a little differently? 'Gorgeous' because it transports you immediately into a world you are familiar with - strong, loyal brothers, a charming, dependent youngest sister whose fragile nature (at least initially) is highlighted by the glass stool she sits on, the number 12 (eleven brothers and their sister), and the immediate tension that this idyllic childhood would not last.

Let's look at some other details in the story that ground us in the world of fairy tales, and in some way shape our vision of our own lives...

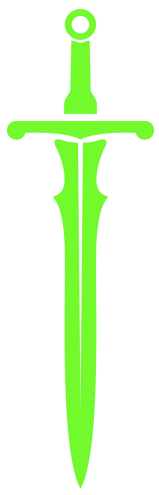




motifs



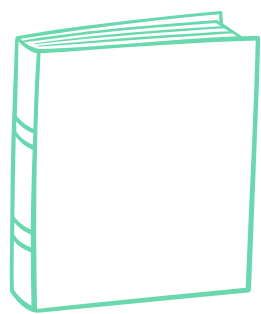
- Star worn on the breast: Since ancient times, a star was often woven into the fabric of clothes as a reminder of their integral place in the fabric of our lives as divine power. Pythagoras, mathematically and musically showed how stars are connected to the soul[1]. Wearing a star on one's breast – the approximate physical location of the heart chakra – accentuates the connection of the star to a person's life source.



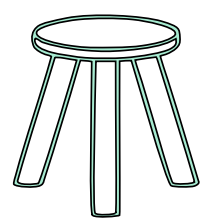
- Sword worn at the side: The sword typically represents power, authority, strength, courage. Juxtapose this next to the princes' sister who sits on a 'little footstool' of glass and looks at a picture book while they read and write with diamonds and gold.



- Say lessons by heart: Another important fairy tale motif. We don't know what the lessons are, but the princes know them not just intellectually, but completely, they are an integral part of their being, just as the messages of fairy tales become a part of our being without our being completely aware of the phenomenon.



- Picture book: One of the subliminal messages we need to be aware of when reading fairy tales. The archetypes are so defined that we forget the stand for meaning and do not necessarily depict the world that's meant to be. The female sibling is not taught to read and write, she is given a picture book – intentionally referred to as a costly one so that we believe that it has extra value. In truth, the underlying message is that she is less intelligent than her brothers and so can only be entrusted with visual portrayals of information.



- Flawless glass: This piggy-backs on the previous theme. The daughter sits on a fragile substance, but the glass is qualified as to be 'flawless', insinuating that the girl herself is precious because of her exterior qualities, not for what she has inside.

Fairy Tale Flip

Self-Discovery Journal

Chapter 2/Week Six



After Elisa put props under the heavy limbs of the tree where she had eaten, she went on into the depths of the forest. It was so quiet that she heard her own footsteps and every dry leaf that rustled underfoot. Not a bird was in sight, not a ray of the sun could get through the big heavy branches, and the tall trees grew so close together that when she looked straight ahead it seemed as if a solid fence of lofty palings imprisoned her. She had never known such solitude. The night came on, pitch black. Not one firefly glittered among the leaves as she despondently lay down to sleep.

The motif of the forest is key in fairy tales. Similar to water (Chapter 1), it signals a rite of passage that the protagonist may or not succeed in overcoming. The forest symbolizes a paradigm shift from one state of consciousness to another, the penetration into the spiritual world, a challenge to face one's inner shadows and vanquish them with light or succumb to them.

In many stories, the forest causes dramatic shifts; however, in 'The Wild Swan', the tone is more subtle. Elisa enters the a lifeless forest after being nourished by a tree bursting with fruit just before the forest begins. Now, she is surrounded by dry leaves, a lack of animal life and not even the sun penetrates through the canopy of the trees above.

She enters a young, naïve girl, meets an old woman who instigates her spiritual shift, and as she leaves the forest, she is wiser and more emotionally fortified for what is to come. On the other side of the forest she finds her brothers, under the curse of the stepmother, transformed into swans. She must leave her childhood and naivité behind in order to save them.



Fairy Tale Flip
Self-Discovery Journal
Chapter 2/Week Six



similar messages in other fairy tales

Other fairy tales with the forest motif that accentuates a 'before and after' paradigm shift on the part of the protagonist:

- The Hut in the Forest: The daughters of a wood-cutter go into the forest to get dinner for the family. Only the youngest daughter is kind to the animals she finds there and is rewarded with a prince and a kingdom of her own.
- The Bamboo Cutter and the Moon Child During his daily ventures into the forest, an old man finds a child in the forest who turns out to bless his life in many ways.
- The Forest of Lilacs: A young girl goes to pick lilacs in the forest, but finds so many, and each better than the last, that she loses her way in her endless search for the best, and never leaves the forest.



Fairy Tale Flip

Self-Discovery Journal

Chapter 2/Week Seven



Just at sunset, Elisa saw eleven white swans, with golden crowns on their heads, fly toward the shore. As they flew, one behind another, they looked like a white ribbon floating in the air. Elisa climbed up and hid behind a bush on the steep bank. The swans came down near her and flapped their magnificent white wings

motifs

The images in this passage appear in many fairy tales and are powerful indicators of subliminal messages:

- **sunset:** often seen as an ending. Elisa sees the sunset on leaving the forest - the ending of her childhood.
- **white:** purity, healing, hope, new beginnings. Elisa has been purified by her journey through the forest and she is the messenger of healing, hope and new beginnings for all of the siblings.
- **crown:** spiritual ascension and enlightenment. To overcome the evil propagated by the stepmother's curse, all of the siblings need to rise to the heavens, travel to what seems like a supernatural land, and heal in their own respective ways.
- **ribbon:** purity, innocence, peace, desire for clarity and honesty. Elisa's question about her brothers is finally going to be clarified, and though long-lasting peace is still far off for all of them, the conflictive circumstances of their separation is now being resolved.
- **steep bank:** overcoming obstacles, perseverance, enabling spiritual growth and self-discovery.



Fairy Tale Flip Self-Discovery Journal

Chapter 2/Week Seven



Using the motifs, in one concise paragraph, the story-teller (Hans Christian Andersen) has given strong clues as to what the true trajectory of the protagonists. He chose these recurring motifs carefully in order subliminally affect the reader into understanding that the journey of the siblings will be not just a physical but also spiritual transformation.

journal entry

In this week's journal, think back on challenges that you've had and where they've led you to. Write in detail what these challenges were and use as many adjectives and qualifiers as possible. Then, read them over and pick out specific words that you've chosen and look beneath the surface. Mull over them. Think deeper about why you've chosen those words and terms. What could the deeper meaning of your own words be telling you about the challenge, and about what very well could have been an opportunity for spiritual growth.

The more honest you are with yourself the more clarity you'll get in your own trajectory for where you are now – and where you can go from here!

Fairy Tale Flip

Self-Discovery Journal

Chapter 2/Week Eight



Do you see this stinging nettle in my hand? Many such nettles grow around the cave where you sleep. Those you must gather, although they will burn your hands to blisters. Once you throw these over the eleven wild swans, the spell over them is broken. But keep this well in mind! From the moment you undertake this task until it is done, you must not speak. The first word you say will strike your brothers' hearts like a deadly knife. Their lives are at the mercy of your tongue."

The magic of fairy tales ignites when the cure to the curse is established, and the more impossible it seems, the more we are captivated by the actions of the protagonists. The resolution to the spell, in this case, is silence and to endure great pain in silence. What would we do in the same situation? Would we persevere? Would we have the fortitude to withstand the challenges our heroine is faced with?

motifs

Nettles: Nettles are known for their stinging properties, which can be seen as a metaphor for breaking through barriers and overcoming obstacles on a spiritual level. The pain caused by their sting is believed to cleanse and purify the body, mind, and soul. They are believed to possess the energy of growth and transformation.



