

# THE JUNIPER TREE

A Study of a Tale from Grimm

Ernest Parkin

## I

The tale has long fascinated me, and I declare it the purpose of this study to try to reach the source of that fascination. My motive, then, is a personal one, but I undertake the task on behalf of readers too, because the theme of the tale is the family and the relationships within it. That the theme is universal, and the experience common, I hope no one would deny.

First, there is a problem of text. The tale exists in several English versions, and there are differences in content. In the edition entitled *Household Stories*, published by Routledge in 1896, the tale, clearly recognizable as “The Juniper Tree”, is called “The Almond Tree”. Those who wish to apply a Freudian approach to Grimm might think it worthwhile to puzzle over the sexual implications of “almond”, as opposed to “juniper”, but the change of title is more easily explained as a mis-translation. Two German words, similar in form and sound, have been confused: “Machandel-” (Juniper), and “Mandel-” (Almond). The confusion has occurred despite a stern footnote in a nineteenth-century German edition of Grimm which reads “ ‘Machandel-’, nicht, ‘Mandel-’.” I therefore proceed secure in my belief that “The Juniper Tree” is the tale’s rightful title.

As for textual variations, in the versions I have read, these have been minor and a matter of detail, sometimes added, sometimes omitted. What are constant in all the versions consulted, are the key elements and events, and the tale’s three-part structure. So, there being no ur-text, the one I have opted for is the version contained in, *Grimm’s Fairy Tales*, the Complete Edition, published in Great Britain by Routledge and Kegan Paul in 1948. The text is based on the translation of Margaret Hunt, as revised, corrected and completed by James Stern; 212 complementary illustrations are provided by Josef Scharl.

It is inevitable now that the tale survives on the printed page, instead of living within an oral tradition, that response to it will be largely literary. For me, however, it is still a tale to be told and heard within a household setting. Only through the story-teller and the speaking voice does the tale come fully alive; only then can one truly appreciate its range of dramatic effects. Imagine, please, the Grandmother seated by the hearth, her voice and gestures taking hold of the audience at her feet, the children of the house.

The tale opens in accordance with fairy-tale convention, and with characteristic economy: “It is now long ago, quite two thousand

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years...” By removing events to the remote past—the timeless past of myth and legend—the sharpness of their impact is distanced, but not dulled. We are introduced to the husband and wife who set the sequence of events in motion. They are presented as an ideal couple. The man is rich; his wife “beautiful, and pious”; and “they love each other dearly”. All they need to complete their happiness is a child, and for this, the wife prays nightly.

Children, hearing this, would see in it everything they would wish their parents to be, and everything they would wish themselves to be when grown up.

In the courtyard in front of the couple’s house is a juniper tree. The tale makes an immediate link between the human and natural world, and will later make them inseparable through the medium of magic and the supernatural.

One day in winter, with snow on the ground, the woman sits beneath the juniper tree, paring an apple. Her state of mind seems to be one of wistful day-dreaming, for she cuts her finger. Seeing her blood on the snow, she sighs heavily and says, “Ah, If I had a child as red as blood and as white as snow!” This winter wish, born of blood, yearns to unite opposites and extremes: red and white; heat and cold; passion and chasteness; potency and purity. It suggests that the wife is more girl than woman, as yet untried by experience, and unaware of the consequences that might follow from what she wishes.

Nevertheless, the wish is granted. She conceives, and the months and symptoms of her pregnancy are parallel to the juniper’s seasonal growth and fruition. In her seventh month, she snatches at the tree’s berries and eats them greedily, like a child. She grows sick, and, in her eighth month, has a premonition of her death in childbirth. She asks her husband to bury her beneath the juniper tree if this should happen. The child is born and is exactly what she wished for. However, her joy is so intense that she dies, and is buried beneath the tree, as she had asked.

So ends the first part of the tale, which is really a story in itself, but one that also demands a sequel. The child that has been born will not know the mother who wished for its birth, and, within the space of a paragraph, we have been initiated into feelings of love, longing, pain, and loss. The pattern and principal motifs of the tale have been established too: the tree, the apple, the seasons’ succession, and the cycle of human emotions. Time as a natural process of healing is likewise posited in that the husband grieves deeply for the loss of his young wife, but with the passage of time, this becomes more bearable, until, eventually, he is able to take a second wife. It is here that the second part of the tale begins.

## II

By his second wife, the man has a daughter. Simultaneously, it is revealed that his first wife’s child, the one “as red as blood and as white as snow”, was a boy.

The woman loves her daughter and wants all her husband’s

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fortune for her. But between the woman and her desire, stands the boy. Greed and hate take root in her heart against him. When he returns from school each day, she pushes him from corner to corner, and slaps him and cuffs him until he is in a state of terror. The boy's father knows nothing of this, and we can infer that the boy is too terrified to tell him.

Children listening will surely identify with the boy, and feel that the woman's treatment of him is cruel and unjust. In Grimm, the step-mother figure is invariably cast as the arch-villainess and, while there are valid socio-historical reasons for this (general life-expectancy, and high mother-mortality in childbirth), there are more cogent psychological ones. For, on to the step-mother, can be projected or displaced all the feelings and behaviour that cannot be reconciled to the image of the loving, protecting natural mother: anger, brutality, the denial of love. By her death in childbirth, the young wife in the tale preserves the ideal image, because she will never have to submit her wish to the daily experience of rearing the child. This rôle is assigned to the step-mother, who enacts what is potentially dark and negative in the parental function. "The Evil One filled her mind", is how my version of the tale describes the inner feelings of the step-mother towards the boy. She envies and fears his priority; fear engenders hate; and hate, murderous intent. The process is as inexorable and sinister as that contained in Blake's poem, "A Poison Tree" (see Appendix) which I invoke as a precise analogy for what now happens.

One day, the woman goes upstairs to her room, and her daughter goes with her. Mother and daughter in the room containing the parental bed—the bed where the children were begotten and born. What is prefigured here is the daughter's destiny when she comes to womanhood. But that is not yet. Once in the room with her mother, the girl asks for an apple which is stored in a chest there. Her mother opens the chest and hands her a fine one; the chest has a great heavy lid and a sharp iron lock. As a metaphor, the chest is unmistakable: it is the womb which nature unlocks at puberty; the place where children ripen before birth. Apple and child are consistently associated in "The Juniper Tree".

Taking her apple, the girl asks, "Mother, is brother not to have one too?" The negative form of the question is an anticipation of refusal, and this tends to prove that she has been a witness to the violence inflicted on her step-brother. But she does not harbour any of her mother's corrosive feelings for him. She has an apple and wants her brother to have one. This shows a natural acceptance of him, and a child's instinct for fairness. There is a predictably angry response from the woman. Hating the boy as intensely as she does, the woman reacts against any sympathetic gesture on the boy's behalf because it implicitly accuses her harsh treatment of him.

"Yes when he comes out of school," is her reply. At which moment, she looks out of the window and sees that the boy is returning. This prompts her to snatch the apple back from her daughter and to say that she shan't have one before her brother. The daughter is now experiencing her mother's dark side, and her brother

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seems to be the cause. By snatching the apple from her, her mother appears to prefer him to her. Therefore, the girl has been given a motive for being jealous of her brother—if she is disposed to nurture it.

When the woman catches sight of the boy through the window, “It was just as if the Devil entered her”. In other words, she is driven by hatred so extreme that it possesses and compels her whole being.

The boy enters the house, and the Devil makes her say to him, “My son, will you have an apple?” There is kindness in her voice, but a wicked look in her eyes, and this contrast is there for any teller of the tale to reproduce. By doing so, the teller helps to illustrate the contradictions and complexities of human behaviour with the same aptness that Blake achieves in these lines:

And I sunned it with smiles,  
And with soft deceitful wiles.  
And it grew both day and night,  
Till it bore an apple bright...

Through its child-like diction, and the momentum of its metre, the poem enacts the inevitable outcome of repressed anger: a poison fruit on a poison tree. A perverted and deadly growth. The concurrence of imagery between poem and tale is quite remarkable.

The boy catches the look in the woman’s eyes, just as, elsewhere in Grimm, Little Red Cap notes the wolf’s big ears, big eyes and mouth, without recognizing it for the threat it is. This demonstrates that innocence is ambivalent in the presence of evil; for that which threatens, at the same time attracts. Thus it is with the boy. Despite the woman’s look, he is tempted by “the apple bright”. As in the Blake poem, the different impulses of tempter and tempted assume form, and meet in an object of mutual desire.

Driven by her terrible compulsion, the woman leads the boy up to the chest, raises the heavy lid, and tells him to take an apple for himself. As he stoops for one, the Devil (we are told) impels the woman to close the chest lid with such force that the sharp iron lock decapitates the boy. A moment of sudden violence and horror. The more shocking if the story-teller reproduces the slamming of the lid.

The head falls among the red apples. There it lies, and there is something so fitting in the juxtaposition that it creates a moment of repose after the step-mother’s brutal act. Blood merges with the colour of the apples and, perhaps the colour of the boy’s cheeks. Beauty succeeds horror in such a way as to mitigate the horror, and the consistency of the imagery linking parents and children makes it possible. The boy dies reaching for an apple; his sister asked for an apple on his behalf, but was herself denied one by an angry mother. The boy’s own mother shed her blood paring an apple and wished for his birth; his step-mother sheds his blood desiring his death. Red apple—red blood: a continuous kinship equation.

The moment’s repose after the murder also gives an essential reassurance to the shocked audience of young listeners, because there is no doubt that it is an acting out of deep fears—principally,

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that of castration.

The reaction of the step-mother to her deed is not remorse or repentance as a Christian conscience might direct, but terror lest it be discovered. She urgently wants to conceal her crime and transfer the blame to someone else. So, taking a white silk handkerchief from her chest of drawers upstairs, she places the boy's head back on the body, folds the handkerchief around the neck to hide the wound, sits the body on a chair in front of the house, and puts an apple in its hand.

Later, the daughter comes into the kitchen and tells her mother that her brother is sitting at the door, looking quite white, and with an apple in his hand. She says that she asked him for the apple, but that he did not answer, and that she was frightened. Once again, there is the girl's instinctive reaction to a disturbing situation (the whiteness of the boy's face, his stillness, and silence) without full knowledge of its cause. Her faculties and physical responses provide the clues without bringing understanding. For that, she looks to her mother.

It is at this point in the tale that the girl ceases to be known generically, and is given a proper name. In my version she is called "Marlinchen", the diminutive of "Marline", which derives from "Mary" and "Maria" (meaning "wished for"), and "Helena" (meaning "bright"). The naming signifies a coming of age, for, with it, Marlinchen assumes her own identity, individual and separate from her parents. She also becomes the leading character in this part of the tale.

Having heard what Marlinchen has to say about her brother, the mother tells her to go back to him, ask him again for the apple, and, if he still doesn't answer, to give him a box on the ear. Those listening know with what purpose the woman gives Marlinchen these instructions and, to them, the woman's wickedness will be magnified. I know that, for me, long acquaintance with the tale has not diminished the emotional impact of her behaviour. A mother so calculating as to betray her own child! Of all the dreadful things we can imagine, this must be one of the worst.

Marlinchen does as she is bid. She goes to her brother, asks for the apple, and, receiving no reply, boxes him on the ear. The head falls off the body as we knew it would and Marlinchen feels straightaway that she is to blame. She has killed her brother, and all for the sake of an apple.

Crying and screaming at the horror of what she thinks she has done, Marlinchen runs to tell her mother, and her mother says, "Marlinchen what have you done? But be quiet; it cannot be helped now, we will make him into black-puddings."

Thus, does the woman think, she can dispose of her guilt. Though, by appearing to protect her daughter, she is actually compounding her crime with another atrocity—reducing the boy's body to black-puddings. She has grown into a monster of unnaturalness prepared to make her daughter confederate in the deed.

Marlinchen obeys, and helps her mother chop up the body. While

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she is doing it, she weeps into the pan in which the black-puddings are cooking, and salts them with her tears. They are not tears of self-pity, but ones shed in genuine grief for the death of her brother. It does, however, add an emotional ambiguity to the tears if one perceives a suppressed rivalry in the brother–sister relationship. The assumption of guilt is so immediate on Marlinchen’s part as to justify the conclusion that the blow she gives her brother is spurred by an unconscious wish. As guilt feelings inevitably attach to such wishes, her guilt, in this sense, precedes the blow she gives him.

Their history confirms my conclusion. Both children were wished for by their respective mothers. This is explicit in the boy’s conception, and implicit in Marlinchen’s name. On one level, this accounts for their natural acceptance of one another. But Marlinchen’s mother behaves towards the boy in a way that characterizes him as an obstacle in her daughter’s way. This is demonstrated by the mother when she first gives Marlinchen an apple, and then denies it to her in favour of the boy. Confirmation follows later when Marlinchen asks her dead brother for the apple he is holding. Suppressed envy colours the apple. Proof that Marlinchen suffers a real conflict of feeling about her brother.

She has seen her mother ill-treat him, and knows the role in which her mother has cast him. At the same time, she accepts him as a brother and is fond of him—her weeping into the cooking pot testifies to this. So, there is a deep bond, compounded of positive and negative emotion, between them. The positive side of that bond is strengthened by what now ensues.

The father comes home, sits down to dinner, and asks where his son is. Marlinchen weeps inconsolably while the woman serves the black-puddings to her husband. The man repeats his question, and his wife replies with a lie. She tells him that the boy has gone across the country to his mother’s great uncle, and will be staying there for a time. To reassure her husband, the woman elaborates the lie by saying that the boy wanted to go for six weeks because he is well taken care of there. The father, eating the food put before him, is hurt that his son didn’t even say goodbye to him. He finds the food delicious, and asks for more and more of it: “You shall have none of it,” he declares greedily. “It seems to me as if it were all mine.”

The irony of this is not lost on the audience as he continues to eat with great gusto, until there is no more, and all the bones are thrown under the table. I urge those who cannot reconcile bones and black-puddings to abandon logic and accept, as any child listening would, the details the tale presents. Trust the tale, and remember the dictum that, what is unreal is not necessarily untrue.

All the while her father is eating, Marlinchen is weeping, because what is being enacted here is the child’s dread of being consumed or eaten alive. I am told this has its origin as early as the first six months of a baby’s life, when eager parental embraces can be mistaken for attempts to devour. “I could eat you all up!” is an expression most of us will recall from childhood. It implies a feeling of love so intense that only ingestion of the object will satisfy it; hence its profound ambivalence. To be eaten, to be absorbed in

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another (the parent) is to have no individual existence. It is, therefore, a threat to one's identity and one's sexuality. The cannibalistic giants of fairy tale are only parents writ large.

What we have in "The Juniper Tree" is a scene of cannibalism—incest. The father, albeit unwittingly eats his son. In some versions of the tale, this scene is missing, and one can understand why nineteenth-century editors would be chary of including it; their tendency was to soften and sweeten the tales. However, its inclusion here provides a line of continuity with the raw and primaevial world of Greek Myth. I can see a connection with Kronos swallowing his offspring, and with Atreus' revenge upon his brother, Thyestes. In both instances, the children were incestuously begotten and, in the latter, Thyestes eats them unwittingly.

Citing classical myths is not gratuitous in these circumstances. The allusions I am making evince a deep psychological complexity in the Grimm tale. In the present scene where the father sits at table eating his son, we have a lying and callous wife, who is also a guilty and deceiving mother; and there is Marlinchen, who feels she has killed her brother, but, because she is an obedient daughter and has been drawn into a compact with her mother, cannot speak. The tears she sheds mingle shame, regret, and loss. Add to this the father's premonition that all may not be well with his son ("Ah, I feel so unhappy lest all should not be right.") and great emotional and psychological resonance has been created.

Of the man's premonition, one might say, "like father—like son". Didn't the boy catch the look on the step-mother's face before she led him to the chest of apples? In both cases, too, the desire to eat overrides any misgivings.

After her father has sated himself on the black-puddings, Marlinchen, with reverence and tenderness, performs the last rites for her brother's remains. She fetches her best silk handkerchief (the ceremony entails a personal sacrifice), gathers the bones from under the table, ties them in the handkerchief, and takes them outside, "weeping tears of blood". This phrase expresses the depth and intensity of her Grief, and conveys the multiple sense in which there is a bond of blood between brother and sister.

Outside, Marlinchen lies down under the juniper tree, and the tree works its magic on her. It calms her and lifts from her heart the heavy burden of guilt and grief. Then the tree itself becomes animated. It trembles. Its branches part and move together as though "someone were rejoicing and clapping his hands". A mist appears to rise from the tree, and the centre of the mist burns like fire. From out of the fire, a beautiful bird flies, singing magnificently. It flies away high into the sky, leaving the juniper tree just as it was, except that the handkerchief and the bones are gone. In this moment of poetic transfiguration, the tree has given birth to the boy's soul in the form of a bird, and has done so in a stylised representation of the movements of the mother's body at the climax of labour. While it is happening, pain and grief give way to joy and wonder.

This visionary event reminds me of Blake's account of seeing his brother Tom's soul rising to heaven and clapping its hands for joy.

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The effect of beholding such a vision is the same for Marlinchen as it was for Blake: relief and elation. She "...was as gay and happy as if her brother were still alive. And she went merrily into the house, and sat down to dinner and ate."

Performing the proper rites for her brother brings ease to Marlinchen, and she can resume the normal life of a child, her spirit free of its leaden oppression. And what Marlinchen feels those listening to the tale will feel too. Thus ends the second part.

### III

At this convenient point of rest, I want to show how appropriate the juniper is to the symbolising purposes of the tale. The Juniper is, of course, an evergreen, and the word's etymology is in the Latin "iuniperis", literally "youth-renewing" from "iuuenis" (young), and "parere" (to produce). Predictably, these Latin roots yield the English "juvenile", and "parent". To reinforce the natal symbolism of the tree, juniper berries were a folk medicine used to induce menstruation. One recalls the young wife greedily eating the berries in the first part of the tale.

In the third and final part, the bird, or boy-soul, takes the leading part as the agent of natural justice. In this role, the bird evokes the memory of yet another Greek Myth: that of King Tereus, his wife, Procne, and sister-in-law, Philomena. Tereus, you remember, rapes Philomena and cuts out her tongue to prevent her proclaiming his guilt. She, however, weaves a message into a tapestry for her sister to read. Together they take their revenge. They kill Itys, son of Tereus and Procne, and serve up his flesh as a meal for his father. The gods intervene and transform the protagonists into birds: hoopoe, swallow, and nightingale, according to the parts they have played. As is well-known, Eliot involves this myth in the second part of *The Waste Land*; he also alludes to "The Juniper Tree" in the second section of *Ash Wednesday*. I am therefore not the first to make these connections.

The bird born of the juniper tree, flies to a goldsmith's house, perches on the roof, and sings this song:

"My mother she killed me,  
My father he ate me,  
My sister, little Marlinchen,  
Gathered together all my bones,  
Tied them in a silken handkerchief,  
Laid them beneath the juniper tree,  
Kywitt, kywitt, what a beautiful bird am I!"

The story is re-told, and the step-mother's guilt revealed. The song is also a statement about Time as a reviving process working through Nature. This process was at work on the father after the death of his first wife and allowed him, in due course, to marry the

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second. Time and Nature, then, heal and restore, and, by restoring they cannot help but reveal what has been hidden. One finds this as a major *a priori* in the work of Shakespeare, which stands in the same tradition as the Greek Myths, the Complete Grimm, and Blake.

The goldsmith, at his work, is moved by the beauty of the bird's song, and rushes out of his house, gold chain in one hand, pincers in the other. In his hurry, he loses one of his slippers. Details such as this add charm, humour, and a quality of fitting observation to the narration.

The goldsmith praises the bird for the beauty of its song, and asks the bird to sing it again. The bird replies that it will do so if the goldsmith gives it the gold chain he is holding. He agrees, and the bird, taking the chain in its right claw, repeats its song.

This done, the bird flies on to the house of a shoemaker, alights on his roof, and sings its song. In turn, moved by the beauty of the bird's song, the shoemaker runs out of his house in his shirtsleeves. Holding up a hand to shield his eyes against the sun, he looks up at the bird perched on his roof. He calls to his wife, his daughter and other children; he calls to his apprentices. All of them come to look at and admire the bird with its fine red and green feathers, its gold neck, and its eyes shining like stars. A fabulous bird!

With his whole household now assembled, the shoemaker asks the bird to sing again, but, in the ritualised procedure established with the goldsmith, the bird first asks for something in exchange. The shoemaker sends his wife to fetch a pair of red shoes from the garret. These the bird takes in its left claw, and then sings its song.

Next, to complete the pattern of three which is a feature of this and other tales in the Grimm collection, the bird flies to a mill far away. The sound of the mill, presumably a water mill is rendered onomatopoeically thus, "klipp clapp klipp clapp". Inside, twenty men are hewing a millstone: "hick hack, hick hack". The bird's song is clearly for the working world, so it sits on a lime tree and sings to the miller and his men.

After the first line of its song, one man stops work to listen; after the second line, two more men stop; and so on, until, by the last line, all twenty are attending. In this way, through formal repetition, do tales for telling aid memory, create aural interest and suspense, and deepen the audience's involvement with the teller.

When all twenty men are listening, the ritual of request and condition is performed. This time, the bird asks for the millstone on which the men are working before it will repeat its song. On all three occasions, the gift accepted is one crafted by hand. His song sung, the bird flies back to his father's house, the gold chain in his right claw, the red shoes in his left, and wearing the millstone round his neck like a collar.

At the house, the father, the mother, and Marlinchen sit at dinner, each experiencing a different emotion. The father is happy and light-hearted because the sun is shining the mother is very uneasy and full of foreboding, "as if a heavy storm were coming"; and Marlinchen weeps, re-visited by grief and remorse. Each one senses that something is about to happen, and each one responds according to

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the state of his or her conscience.

When the bird arrives and perches on the roof, the father, seated at the table inside, says, "I feel just as if I were about to see some old friend again." His wife is seized with terror. Her teeth chatter, and she declares that she seems to have fire in her veins. The tale reports that she tears open her stays, so extreme is her distress. Naturally, what afflict her are the pains of her own denied guilt, experienced as the flames of hell-fire. Marlinchen, her own burden of guilt having returned, holds her plate before her eyes and weeps until it is quite wet. The scene is set for the climax of the tale.

The bird begins its song, and, at the first line, "My mother she killed me", the woman stops her ears and shuts her eyes, but a storm of violent emotions rages within her. There is a roaring in her ears, and her eyes burn and flash like lightning.

To the husband, the bird and its song are at one with the sun shining and his benign mood. He comments that there is a smell in the air just like cinnamon, which is an indication, along with the sunshine, that it is spring and the time of renewal. Marlinchen still hides her face and weeps.

The man ("father" and "man" are alternating terms in the tale, as are "mother" and "woman") announces that he is going outside to see the bird. The woman pleads with him not to: "I feel as if the whole house were shaking and on fire," she says, being consumed by her own guilt.

She is not heeded. The man goes outdoors and hears the rest of the bird's song. As the bird ends its song, it lets fall the gold chain from its right claw, and the chain falls exactly round the man's neck. No doubt this is meant to acknowledge his sovereign role as head of the household, child-beggetter and family provider. But, quite why the father should be rewarded in this manner is difficult to say, he takes little active part in the tale, yet, as the creator of the domestic situation, cannot be regarded as entirely blameless. The tale, however, keeps him innocent of his responsibility. Perhaps the fact that the focus is on the step-mother and the children, and he is kept in the background, ensures that he can be honoured with the gift. Perhaps the tale is obeying convention. This is conjecture. Obviously, the tale does not descend to us in a pure form, any more than any folk song does. The modes of transmission virtually guarantee that elements will be acquired, and elements lost. Consider, in this respect, the editorial influence of the Brothers Grimm themselves. What a tale will tend to acquire are those elements of an historical and ideological kind. Thus, one can understand why "The Juniper Tree" absolves the father, and why it affirms the primacy of the paternal role.

Acquisitions are unavoidable anyway, given the nature of folk material. The wonder of their survival is that a core of integrity always seems to be preserved, as in the subject of this study. In any case, some of the acquisitions do help the tale as art. For instance, whilst being set in the remote past, the tale contains references to more recent history. In the first part, the young wife is described as "pious", which implies Christian, and she prays devoutly. The

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second wife, in her hatred for the boy, is possessed by a Protestant devil of which Luther would have approved. The boy goes to school each day. Though these are anachronisms, and relate more to the context in which the tale is now told than the one in which it is supposed to have happened two thousand years ago, their everyday familiarity works to draw the audience into the narration. It is paradoxical that the remoteness of the setting does help to cushion the impact of brutal events, while familiar details help to give the tale relevance and immediacy. Paradoxical maybe, but very effective story-telling.

Similar seeming inconsistencies help a young audience identify with the situation and characters in the tale. Though the father is said to be a rich man, there is nothing ostentatious or extravagant about his household. His wife stores apples, cooks and serves meals, like any peasant woman, and there is no mention of servants. These details may have been acquired in transit from teller to teller, it is impossible to say. However, what can be said with certainty is that they root the tale in a recognizable daily experience that is really lived. As such, they are the essential devices of successful story-telling; part of its technique.

A friend of mine, who is a retired child psychologist, offers another explanation. She says the inconsistencies disappear if one looks on myths and folk tales as dreams. It is true they do work as emanations of the Unconscious in which suppressed fears, wishes, and impulses are dramatised symbolically. And it is true one has to accept the given content of a dream, no matter how absurd or illogical it is. As my friend used to say to children referred to her: "Never mind if you tell me a lie; it will tell me something about you." Accept what is given, and it will reveal things to you. As I said earlier, trust the tale!

At the same time, what remains true is that these tales are narratives consciously fashioned by art. So the one explanation does not cancel the other; both can co-exist.

## IV

To return to the tale: The father, his gold chain about his neck, re-enters the house to show off his handsome gift. His wife is beside herself with dread. She drops to the floor, and her cap falls off her head. As the bird begins his song a second time, she faints.

Marlinchen, drawn to the bird, goes to see if it has a gift for her. When she appears through the door, the bird, without interrupting its song, throws down the red shoes to her. The moment she puts them on, Marlinchen's grief and remorse give way to joy, and she dances and leaps back into the house to tell her parents of her gift. By the putting on of the shoes, and by the access of vitality that follows, Marlinchen claims her full sexual identity, her independent womanhood, and her capacity to bear children.

The mother cannot share Marlinchen's joyful mood. She is so

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terrified that her hair stands up “Like flames of fire”, and she has such a premonition of doom that she feels the world is about to come to an end. This is her personal Day of Judgement, and she is drawn irresistibly to it.

She says she will go outside to see if that will make her heart feel lighter. But, as soon as she appears, the bird throws down the millstone on to the woman’s head, and she is entirely crushed by it. The symbol of her guilt is the weighty instrument of her punishment.

Marlinchen and her father rush to see what has happened, and behold smoke, flames and fire rising from the place. When these clear, what should greet their eyes but the boy, the son and brother, alive! In accordance with the meaning of its name, the juniper has renewed the youth, for, like Eden’s tree, the juniper is a symbol of generation and regeneration. The associations of the Eden Myth (tree, apple, fertility, sexual knowledge) attach themselves quite naturally to this tale, and so does the Blake poem.

The boy takes his father and Marlinchen by the hand; they re-enter the house together; sit down to dinner, and eat. Now that wickedness has been punished, and a domestic trinity restored, daily life can be resumed. This resumption furnishes the tale’s happy ending.

### V

In concluding this study I must express my indebtedness to Bruno Bettelheim, who, in his book *The Uses of Enchantment* (Thames & Hudson, 1976), proves the psychological and affective richness of traditional fairy tales, and their superiority to modern substitutes. There is, though, no mention of “The Juniper Tree” in his book. This is not surprising. He had to be selective in his tales, and the book deals with tales from other sources than Grimm.

For my part, I am grateful for the chance to undertake what Bettelheim does not attempt, and, in my approach to “The Juniper Tree”, I have tried not to apply any ready-made theoretical apparatus, but to let the tale speak to me. Hence the form of this study is determined by the content of the tale.

I said at the outset that this tale has long fascinated me. That it addresses a universal experience within the family is evident enough, particularly the experience of those early years when children are most exposed to their parents, and to each other. In childhood, we exist in a state of experiencing without understanding. We see, feel, and are troubled by the family drama, but, like the brother and sister in the tale, we only partly know its causes, if we know them at all. And one can say with certainty that this condition continues into adult life, often preventing us becoming fully-integrated human beings with a separate and secure identity.

The value of tales such as “The Juniper Tree”, is that they enter the child’s inner world of feeling, and are companions to trust on that difficult road through childhood to maturity. Because of their seemingly inexhaustible content, and because they are art, they afford imaginative release, and point the way towards wholeness of

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being. The greatest obstacle to its achievement comprises those negative feelings we nurture within us from an early age, and which, for fear, shame guilt or confusion, we dare not speak. “The Juniper Tree” acknowledges their reality, and shows the consequences of their nurture. As a narrative with symbolic meaning, “The Juniper Tree” fulfils a vital psychological and aesthetic, function, and this earns it a place in the legacy of world literature.

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### Appendix

#### A Poison Tree

I was angry with my friend:  
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.  
I was angry with my foe:  
I told it not, my wrath did grow.

And I watered it in fears,  
Night and morning with my tears;  
And I sunned it with smiles,  
And with soft deceitful wiles.

And it grew both day and night,  
Till it bore an apple bright,  
And my foe beheld it shine,  
And he knew that it was mine,

And into my garden stole  
When the night had veil'd the pole:  
In the morning glad I see  
My foe outstretch'd beneath the tree.

William Blake

The suppressed anger breeds hatred of the foe and a desire to destroy him. This desire develops out of fear, frustration, and external shows of fawning friendliness (“smiles”, and “soft deceitful wiles”) that disguise the desire. The foe is flattered by this behaviour and lured, by envy, to steal the object in which tempter and tempted meet, the “apple bright”.

The foe is drawn to his destruction by his own desires; and the gloating “I” can rejoice gleefully at revenge accomplished. A pattern of emotion which corrodes and corrupts both subject and object.