

Cinderella the Dragon Slayer*

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This paper aims to show that such apparently disparate themes as “Cinderella” and “The Dragon Slayer” convey nevertheless a unitary semantic constellation. The main methodological contention is that symbolical analysis calls for the abandoning of classificatory assumptions. On theoretical grounds, the present discussion attempts to develop Vladimir Propp’s unheeded insight that all fairy tales derive from a single source.

One Irish version of the “Dragon Slayer” theme presents a prince driven from home and working as a cowherd, who thrice secretly sheds his rags and fights a dragon while dressed in glorious apparel, then reverts to his humble position. As the hero flees after his third deed, the rescued princess gets hold of one of his boots. A proclamation is issued whereby he who this boot will fit is to have the princess in marriage. All the bridegrooms-to-be try it on, to no avail, until only the cowherd is left. The boot fits him, and marriage is celebrated (Curtin 1890, 157-74).

This version – representative of what Kurt Ranke described as the Irish shoe redaction of the Northern Cycle of AaTh 300 (Thompson 1977, 30) – looks like a male version of the Cinderella/Catskin pattern (AaTh 510). Note, furthermore, that the lost shoe incident is not restricted to Ireland; similarities with the Cinderella cycle are not restricted to the shoe; nor are the overall similarities between the Dragon Slayer and Cinderella confined to the field of AaTh 300-303. For example, tale types 314, 502, and 532 all describe the adventures of a boy expelled from home, thereafter disguised in rags as a gardener, who thrice sheds his tatters and fights dragons (or equivalent foes), then reverts each time to his humble position until some token – such as a wounded thigh amounting to the same effect as having only one shoe: that of being lame – permits him to bring forth his golden hair and magnificent apparel (see Thompson 1977, 59-61). In this cycle of tales, widespread in Europe, such precise details as the hero’s appearances in shining blond hair, his successive gowns with the colors of the sun, moon and stars, his hiding under animal skins while working as a herdsman, gardener or kitchen hand, and the fact of being recognized by a mark relating to the lower members, all contribute to the impression that – somehow – the Dragon Slayer is a male Cinderella.

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This equation (or parts of it) has been common knowledge for some time now. In *The Legend of Perseus*, Sidney Hartland reported a sandal being fitted onto a dragon-slayer's foot, the owner of which he matter-of-factly referred to as a "masculine Cinderella" (Hartland 1894, 61). Likewise, in a study on "Cendrillon masculin", Emmanuel Cosquin mentioned as such a Slavic releaser of the sun and moon (Cosquin 1922, 494-97) who is a dragon slayer (cf. Ralston 1873, 66-70). For his part, in an article on Cinderella, William Ralston stated, "the tales of 'Goldenlocks' and of 'Cinderella-Catskin' are evidently twin forms of the same narrative, brother and sister developments of the same historical or mythological germ" (Ralston 1982, 48-49). Yet, efforts at explaining this widespread blend of the cherished paradigms of the active hero and the long-suffering heroine have been wanting.

In what follows I will take for granted that any explanation resorting to the notion of "contamination" cannot really explain much. Since the sheer extent of the "contamination" would have to qualify as "epidemic," a fact which would in itself demand an explanation; thus, the problem would be merely dislodged. Moreover, the very notion of contamination stems from a typological project built upon inconsistent theoretical premises. We all know how strongly Stith Thompson affirmed that "for a systematic classification of folk-narrative a clear differentiation between type and motif is necessary," and also how he asserted that "a clear-cut difference between type and motif" distinguishes Antti Aarne's original index from all other lists (Thompson 1977, 415, 417). Nevertheless, Thompson acknowledged that a type "may consist of only one motif", while the "great majority" of motifs "may serve as true tale types" (415-16) – which of course reveals the absence of any clear-cut difference. Indeed, Thompson recognized that in Aarne's groundwork, whenever types and motifs were not coincident in the first place, "theoretical consistency has made way for practical convenience" (417-18).

Dundes thus rightly points out that in the overall system purportedly raised on theoretical distinctions between motifs and types, "to a large extent the motif and tale type systems are overlapping ... the categories of motifs are ... overlapping ... tale types are also overlapping" (1997, 197). However, while this author strongly states, "tradition and convenience are hardly sufficient reasons for scholars to perpetuate an acknowledged error," he grants that there is "a definite place" for "a practical index such as Thompson's" (1962, 99, 101, 103-04). In other words, Dundes holds that "the fundamental theoretical issue was never really resolved" and that "the overlapping difficulties ... aside, ... the fact remains that the motif and tale type indices ... remain indispensable for the identification of traditional folk narratives," which "is a necessary prerequisite for interpretation" (1997, 200). This one question remains, though: how could one base sound "interpretations" on inadequate "identifications"?

If, as I propose, the very notion of "contamination" stems from a projection of the classification's inconsistency onto its very object (one unwarranted result of the unresolved theoretical issue Dundes speaks about), then to use it would amount to disposing of a problem by reiterating the contours of the classification which that very problem challenges. Alternatively, I shall attempt to explain the large-scale connections between the "Dragon Slayer" and the "Cinderella" themes beyond the empirical level at which so-called "contaminations" are postulated. Specifically, in what follows I shall delineate a model of the "Dragon Slayer" theme from mostly Iberian data, in which empirical resemblances to "Cinderella" are hardly to be found. Then – still taking Iberian data as a starting point, but

increasingly making use of other regional traditions – I shall sketch a model of the core theme of the European “Cinderella cycle.” From the results obtained, I hope to show that the “Cinderella” and the “Dragon Slayer” cycles reflect, from complementary perspectives, a common semantic field: i.e., the Dragon Slayer as “Cinderella” is but one half of an overall picture that comprises Cinderella as a “Dragon Slayer.”

Iberian Dragon Slayers

In Iberian tradition the most straightforward form of dragon-slayer tales is characterized by an only child (or a boy with a sister) who kills a multiple-headed serpent and consequently marries a princess. Then, one step ahead in plot complexity, one finds tales marked by two twins born from a fish, one of which – the serpent slayer proper – gets killed, after his marriage, by a witch at the Tower of the Ill Hour (or Castle of No Return) and is resuscitated by his twin brother. This is exactly how things should be, according to both AaTh 300 and AaTh 303. However, many versions present *three* twins born from a fish, and most of these texts omit the serpent episode while featuring only the Castle of No Return motif (Espinosa 1947, 3: 15-16). Furthermore, the fact that the single boy’s mother or sister may betray him generates new developments (16-21).

From the fact that one single boy defeats one dragon, or one of two twins slays a multiple-headed serpent and the other defeats a witch, one could infer that the snake is to the witch as one twin is to the other. Since, indeed, several variants simply replace the serpent episode by the Castle of No Return incident, there is a definite equivalence between the dragon and the witch struggles. However, the dragon fight - in and by itself - requires just one boy, whereas the witch fight by itself always takes triplets (the first two falling at the hands of the crone). Therefore, one would expect to find at some level an equivalence between “three” and “one” as far as the number of brothers is concerned, and – if this be so – to see the number three associated, somehow, with the fight against the dragon.

The two problems are connected. “Three” is akin to “one” in the sense that it expresses a notion of complex unity. Thus the Holy Trinity is one threefold entity, three brothers or sisters are a unit of brethren, etc. As Dundes expresses it, in such cases of “the triune or the three-in-one ... the three subdivisions are not separate and independent; instead they are part of a whole” (1980, 137). In other words, the congenital triplets convey the notion of – to use Heinrich Zimmer’s suggestive expression – “the identity-in-essence of the separate-in-form” (1993, 284). Now this equivalence of three to one requires that the notion of “one” be composite; which takes us directly to the dragon slayer. Georges Dumézil has successfully isolated within the Indo-European domain a Dragon Slayer theme in which “the third kills the triple” (1985, 27-29). This is of course in strict conformity with Axel Olrik’s observation to the effect that “*achtergewicht* combined with the Law of Three is the principal characteristic of folk narrative – it is an epic law” (1965, 136-37). The simplest statement of this would be: “In fairy tales, the third of three brothers kills a multiple monster endowed with three heads.” However, one may also find a single hero acting as a triple persona as he kills a foe with only one head (or with a threefold increasing number of heads) in a three-staged battle. Thus, a triple single hero is equivalent to a single series of triplets, just as a single three-headed dragon may replace a series of three foes.

If indeed *both* the slayer and his victim are triple, this should imply some form of identity between them. Actually, it is a well-known secret that the dragon slayer and his

victim are essentially one. Calvert Watkins, working on Indo-European formulas conveying the “Dragon Slayer” theme, notes “the near-identities of the names ... of the hero and attributes ... of the dragon” (1995, 314), and thus the “reciprocal, reversible, or bidirectional thematic relation” between the adversaries (325; cf. 373, 382, 386-88, 398-99) within a global theme of death overcome (316-17, 325-26, 346, 351-54, 390-96). Likewise, Jane Harrison notes of the Greek Cadmos that he “who is a snake-slayer is also himself a snake,” and she remarks that Jason is figured “being born anew” from the dragon’s jaws – with the implication that “the dragon’s slayer is of the dragon’s seed” (1963, 434-35; cf. 1992, 495). Quite independently, Ananda Coomaraswamy notes that the Dragon Slayer – related to his victim “by filiation or younger brotherhood, and *alter ego* rather than another principle” – was “born to supplant the Father,” as indeed “he takes possession of the first-born dragon’s treasure and powers and becomes what he was” (1943, 6,8). The identity of the seven-headed serpent and its killer, and the underlying cyclic conception of rebirth, is also well known in Japanese tradition (Ouwehand 1977; Mauclair 1982). In the same vein, in European fairy tales the identity of the begetting sea-creature and the slain sea-monster is clear – thus the childless woman may explicitly get pregnant from eating the heart of a sea dragon (Basile 1932, 1: 85-91), and the soulless son of the queen of fishes needs not fear the sea-serpent (Cosquin 1978, 2: no. 37). The plain fact that the King of Fishes begot him, who is fated to defeat the Sea Dragon, is then one way of suggesting that – as Vladimir Propp (1983, 363, cf. 290-91) put it – “he who was born from the dragon will kill the dragon.”

A consideration of the equivalence between “one” and “three”, therefore, leads to the conclusion that both the slayer and the victim are complex entities, and furthermore to the idea that the two are but different aspects of one single entity. Thus, the principle of polar opposition appears within that of multiple unity, that is “two” appears within the realm of “three.” To understand this it is necessary to bear in mind that “three” is a number of perfection which – being odd – allows for renewal. Hence, the third of three siblings tends to be opposed in binary terms to the other two; he/she alone being able to tap the hidden forces called upon to operate renovation. Such tension within unity is then expressed as a relationship between two polarized elements, which are often reduced to two brothers (as in most Iberian variants that incorporate the fight both against the dragon and the witch). One might thus say that while the number three emphasizes the unity of a series, the number two stresses its underlying tension. At any rate, the overall theme of triplets born from a single fish - being opposed in binary terms and yet declared to be exactly alike - suggests that Olrik’s “laws” of Three, of Contrast, and of Twins are inseparable facets of a deeper principle of dynamic unity underlying a landscape of complex entities.

After seeing that one boy thrice attempting to kill a multiple-headed serpent, and three boys once fighting a one-headed witch, perform equivalent acts (which admit of virtually infinite intermediary variations), let me now concentrate on the complex plots that cumulate in both fights. Earlier on, I proposed that the witch is to the serpent as one twin is to the other. Now we know that the twins are both alike and different. Note that the first brother as “dragon slayer” gets killed by the witch, then is resuscitated by the second brother as “witch slayer”, and finally proceeds to kill his saviour, then to revive him by the same powers that had revived himself. The twins share for sure the essence of the dragon whence they originate, and concurrently they conquer death; but while the first gains a wife and crown as he slays the dragon, the last acquires the defeated witch’s unfathomable

riches and power of resurrection. Consequently, the serpent and the witch appear themselves as complementary aspects of one entity which on the one hand, surrenders marriage and sovereignty and on the other hand riches from the underground and new life through death.

The “Medusa witch” – as Hartland (1894, 20, 26) appropriately called the old woman – indeed presents unmistakable ophidian traits. In most Portuguese variants her realm is the “Tower of the Ill-Hour” – which expresses the same “death” notion as the Spanish Castle of No Return – located in the middle of the sea (see below), described as “very tall” (Vasconcelos 1963, no. 280) and generally endowed with a deep pit. In other words, the witch’s realm encompasses the aerial, terrestrial, and underground/underwater spheres that are the overall space of the dragon: an aquatic serpent endowed with both legs and wings. It is thus understandable that, in a French version, the hag’s castle should also appear cyclically as a dragon’s cavern (Sébillot 1983a, 133). Alternatively, in Iberian versions, the place where the princess is rescued from the seven-headed serpent may be a palace of no return, just as the old woman’s abode is a Castle of No Return (Sánchez Pérez 1942, no. 98; Espinosa 1946, no. 139). Furthermore, one single phrase: “Forward, my lion!” is used against both the serpent and the old crone (Vasconcelos 1963, no. 279). Indeed one version explicitly states that “the fiery dragon” is the son of the “hellish old woman” in the castle (Caballero 1878, 11-19). Or else, the old woman is really a giant (Soromenho and Soromenho 1984, no. 227) – a much suffering old man, according to one variant – whose life principle lies within a serpent, or in the sea (Coelho 1985, no. 16; Espinosa 1987, no. 66). The underlying ophidian connotation of the “exceedingly old thing” (Soromenho and Soromenho 1984, no. 230) – one instance, really, of the Portuguese adage “as old as the serpent” (Vasconcelos 1986, 179) – is moreover a stable element in European traditions. For example, a French variant presents a seven-headed witch (Cosquin 1978, no. 5b), an Italian version shows her as a golden-horned snake (Hartland 1894, 41), and a German text describes the defeated witch’s agent of resurrection as the fat of a slain snake (Hunt 1968, 1: 420; cf. Caballero 1878, 11-19).

Furthermore, the essential identity between the old hag and the serpent is clear in the idea that the former is the sister, mother, or wife of the slain dragon(s) (Afanas'ev 1980, 463-475; Caballero 1878, 11-19; Hartland 1894, 33; Ralston 1873, 66-70), or even the hero’s stepmother, having the same nature – that of a troll, which in Scandinavia consistently replaces the dragon – as the hero’s foe (Christiansen 1964, no. 72). Now this connection of the witch to the “dark” side of a mother directly points back to the initial situation in which an old fisherman cannot produce either fishes or progeny. After the king of fishes offers the fisherman all the catch he may care to get, the old man rests happy with this kind of bounty – abundance of “small fish” but, still, no children. However, his wife demands “to eat a fish big enough to provide ‘steaks’” (Cardigos 1996, 60), thus incorporates the king of fishes, and gets pregnant. Note that when the wife does not explicitly demand to eat the fish, the king of fishes himself asks to be given to her (Espinosa 1987, no. 68). Within the symbolic framework of “small fish becoming a metaphor for inadequate potency” (Cardigos 1996, 61), and desire for big fish standing for a resolve to have children (a still current slang word for “penis” in Portuguese, *picha*, directly stems from Lat. *pisce*, “fish”), the fisherman’s wife functions therefore as a sea king’s consort. In other words, her predetermined link to the king of fishes foreshadows that between the witch and the dragon.

The mother and the witch appear, then, as two images of one entity controlling the death and rebirth of both the king of fishes and its son, just as the fish and the serpent/dragon emerge as a single being that dies to be reborn through its son. The sacrifice of the fish and the birth of its sons through the woman have, of course, a sexual innuendo; so does the death and rebirth of the boys at the hands of the witch. Indeed, in Portuguese tradition the crone states, prior to the fight with the first boy, that she enjoys “going thus in a boat [*barco*] with young gents,” and moreover she invites the second boy to a fight by saying: “let us go in the little boat [*barquinha*]!” (Soromenho and Soromenho, no. 229). These words express, of course, the aquatic situation of the tower, also evident in Scandinavian variants (Hartland 1894, 33-34; Holbek 1987, 558-59). An underlying double entendre is, however, brought to light by another version in which the old woman professes to have sworn not to let anyone into the tower without “a few fights,” and then invites the first boy to “go onto some *abarcas* [with her]” (Oliveira n.d., 1: 113). This noun – which contains the word *barcas*, “boats,” found in the previous variants – refers to the verb *abarcar*, “to embrace,” and indeed the net result of such *abarcas* over the years is “hundreds of people drowned by the old woman in her iron arms” (114).

In short, the female counterpart to the dragon - connoting the boys’ own mother or being elsewhere described as a stepmother - lures boys into deadly embraces with an erotic connotation in a watery setting from which they will be reborn. Now, the amorous undertone of the fight with the old woman leads to the observation that the tower may be inhabited by a “very beautiful lady” (Ampudia 1925, no. 15), or – as one version explicates – by the hag *and* her daughter, who does the fighting jobs (Pedroso 1988, 332). One version links the death of the witch to the disenchantment of three maidens dwelling in the tower, whom the three brothers take for wives after having previously married (without consummation) one single wife on their way to the tower (Pedroso 1984, 124). That this suggests an identity between the first wife and the three princesses, as well as the unity of these as a rejuvenation of the witch, is borne out by a third version that clearly – if tacitly – assimilates the first brother’s wife to a young witch, and their very marriage to the subsequent fight with the “exceedingly old thing” at the tower (Soromenho and Soromenho 1984, no. 230). Indeed, it is usually within the time-span of the “Tobias Nights,” taken as potentially lethal for bridegrooms who would engage in amorous action (see Gennep 1980, 555-56; Frazer 1918, 1: 499, 518-20; Pedroso 1988, 81-82; Saintyves 1934, 278-82; Westermarck 1922, 3: 558-565; 1934, 46-50), that the hero notices the tower, goes and dies there; as if the deadly fight were part of the wedding consummation itself.

In this light, one may measure the importance of Aurélio Espinosa’s observation that the death on the wedding night is sometimes operated by a “traitor sister or mother” placing in the boy’s bed “a pin, or the teeth of the slain dragon or sorcerer” (Espinosa 1947, 3: 16, 19). A mother infatuated with the dragon (such is the cause of her felony) takes us back, of course, to the boys’ mother demanding the king of fishes for herself. Moreover, her role in killing the dragon-slayer confirms her identity to the witch as female counterparts to the dragon. In the same sense, the lethal sister and the young wife – younger versions of, respectively, the mother and the witch – are then equivalent.

Let me unravel one implication of this. I previously noted that the dragon’s female counterpart can be a lover, a mother, and a sister to him. Furthermore, the fact that the old witch connotes a murderous mother, sister, and wife to the dragon slayer reveals a similar pattern in the next generation. Therefore, the witch as mother and sister/wife to both the

dragon and his son – whose identity is hence confirmed – synthesizes three generations (cf. Zimmer 1993, 82-84). This expresses of course an underlying incest theme, the general logic of which Sophocles masterfully laid out. In *Oedipus Rex*, this author pointedly states that Oedipus shed in his father's blood his own blood, and then *repeated* the same act by infusing his mother with receding male seed – his father's and his own, as one – that brought to light fathers, brothers, and sons; brides, wives, and mothers (1400-408). In other words, having killed his father, Oedipus replaced him in the "furrows" of the double mother-field of both himself and his children (1256-57), and by "plowing" the very place where he was "sown" (1496-499) became one with his father (1209-12) and a brother to his own children (1481-82). Thus, the wife who conceived of the seed responsible for her husband's death was fated to monstrously breed double – husband by husband, children by her child (1245-250).

In short, Sophocles equates parricide and incest in an overall picture of three confused generations. According to this logic, slaying the dragon – being tantamount to killing one's own father – entails incest and the resulting conflation of generations; which is precisely what the preceding analysis shows. Now, in the tales the notion of "incest" expresses the idea of two unisexual lines self-rejuvenating, along with the notion of an underlying identity between those lines. The dragon slayer supersedes a "father" through battle, as his bride replaces a "mother" through marriage. Moreover, the fight with "marriage" connotation – which replaces an old serpent by a young bride, while operating the death and resurrection of the dragon slayer – synthesizes both trends. Indeed, this amorous fight expresses the equivalence – as noted long ago by Coomaraswamy (1945) – between the kissing of a "Loathly Bride" and the slaying of a dragon as two means of freeing a bride from her ophidian condition. One may then define the fight in the Tower of the Ill Hour, or Castle of No Return, as the overcoming of death by both the dragon-slayer, standing for the dragon, and his bride prolonging the witch. It is, in other words, the rejuvenation of both the male and the female aspects of the dragon as they reunite in the guise of youths who disenchant each other through marriage. Now the "incest" aspect of this marriage supposes the view that all *dramatis personae* are discrete units. Granted, however, their essential unity, one may speak instead of an essential androgyny underlying all aspects of a complex, ophidian entity that self-rejuvenates through a process of death and resurrection, on the model of a serpent's cast of skin.

It may be fruitful, at this point, to consider the "Cinderella" cycle.

Cinderella the bird/serpent

It is characteristic of Iberian tradition that the persecuted heroine is sent out with the cattle to the hills in impossible conditions. On the grazing grounds, a cow - variously associated to the deceased mother - feeds her and completes the girl's spinning tasks. As the stepmother decides to have the cow killed, the animal instructs the girl to wash its entrails in a brook, and then follow whatever comes out of them. Thus the girl is led into the aquatic dwelling of three fairies who grant her shining attributes (the half-sister will get dark correlates) and is thereafter put under hide, covered with cinders, etc., by her stepmother, who calls her "Earthen-Cat." From here, the "Cinderella" story *stricto sensu* unfolds.

Note how the motherly cow, put to death by the stepmother, leads the girl to the fairies. The underlying equivalence between the dead mother, the aquatic fairies, and the

linking cow is indeed a stable feature of European tradition. In order to briefly grasp its meaning, I will turn to well-known examples. Note that the aquatic setting of Iberian fairies is akin to Mother Holle's underwater realm in the Grimms' collection (Grimm no. 24). Moreover, the fact that those fairies often appear in the guise of birds (Pedroso no. 18, 37) is parallel to the appearance of Aschenputtel's dead mother in the same guise (Grimm no. 21). This is significant, since the Grimms describe the girl who first visits Mother Holle as the "Cinderella of the house" (Hunt 1968, 133), and indeed this girl gets her golden hue from Mother Holle after spending a snowy winter underground, just as Aschenputtel proper receives her clothes from a tree she planted on her mother's tomb after the thaw. In both instances, the means for the heroine's marriage then come from the underground/underwater realm of the dead; either from her mother, or from Holle.

The equivalence between the dead mother and the underwater fairies implies the interchangeability between permanence under cinders and a sojourn in the netherworld. Indeed, in cultural contexts where only the dead mother's bones happen to be buried (as in the Balkans), they are so indifferently under *ashes*, in *earthenware*, or *underground* (Angelopoulou 1989, 72-73). The Grimms' collection presents this same equivalence in the context of a wider homology between the images of the heroine: replacing her wooden clogs by golden shoes after discarding the dust and dirt that covered her (No. 21); turning golden upon leaving Mother Holle's underworld (No. 24); in full splendour after removing the soot and fur cloak that concealed her (No. 65); in a dazzling array after leaving a dark iron stove (No. 89); shining forth after removing the skin that veiled her (No. 179). Emergence from cinders, soot, animal or human skins is thus akin to coming to light from a dark realm, the nature of which is made clear by the fact that the skin covering the heroine is often that of a recently dead woman (see Cox 1893, no. 141, 147, 155, 215, 281; cf. Cosquin 1922, 5-6; Goldberg 1997, 33-38; Hartland 1886, 317).

In view of this, it is worth noting that Mother Holle is said to have such large teeth that the "good" girl gets frightened upon first seeing her. In a British version, the same character is described as a green lady whom both girls (peeping through a keyhole) see dancing with a bogey – that is to say a spectre—and the food offered in this house takes those who would eat it to the graveyard (Briggs 1991, 286-89). Furthermore, the joint consideration of the British *green* lady and of the *big-toothed* German fairy living in an underground, aquatic realm suggests an ophidian entity, which indeed stands clearly revealed in the case of *Arie*, a French cognate of Holle (Gennep 1987, 3019-23; Grimm 1882, 412; Sébillot 1983a, 280-82; cf. Christinger 1965, 129).

Now, in the "Cinderella" cycle, the continuity between the dead mother and Cinderella is an unvarying feature; thus, the father often wishes to marry his daughter *because* she is the very image of the deceased wife. From this perspective, the heroine who sheds a dead woman's skin since she is disenchanted appears as a rejuvenated mother. More generally, the dead mother reappearing at her prime through her daughter's shedding of a skin takes us back to the notion of the self-rejuvenation of an ophidian entity. Reconsider, in this perspective, the Grimms' version (Grimm no. 21). Here the dying mother tells her child that she will watch her from up above, then is buried down below. A tree growing on the grave, from the boughs of which a bird helps the heroine, synthesizes this polarity. As Marija Gimbutas remarked, a tree and a vertically winded serpent are interchangeable symbols connoting "a column of life rising from caves and tombs," since "the life force of the snake is linked to that of the dead . . . Thus the snake symbolizes the

continuity of life between the generations” (1989, 136-37). In the Grimms’ version, a tree linking avian entities – the dead mother as pigeons; her daughter as “goose,” commanding “all the birds beneath the sky” and betraying her identity as she hides in the pigeon house – symbolizes, I suggest, such ophidian-like continuity.

This mother/daughter axis therefore mirrors the father/son axis behind the “Dragon Slayer” theme. This is still overly simplistic, however, since the “Dragon Slayer” theme comprises a female axis of rejuvenation – as well as a male one – within an androgynous whole. Can one find a parallel to this within the “Cinderella” cycle? While, in many Iberian variants, the mistreated heroine is sent out to graze a cow representing her helping mother, in a group of Portuguese versions the heroine is sent out to graze a bull belonging to her father (Soromenho and Soromenho 1986, no. 645-649; Oliveira n.d., 2: 31-33). This animal fights against a triple foe – connoting the many-headed dragon – in gardens of copper, silver and gold, then it is killed and skinned by the heroine with a knife belonging to the defeated enemy. Its skin is buried (along with three flowers taken from the dragons’ gardens) under a stone whence appear the dresses for the three balls in which the heroine seduces the prince, who is finally none other than the bull, disenchanting (Oliveira, 2: 31-33).

The “Dragon Slayer” theme thus crops up within the “Cinderella” cycle when a male link between the heroine’s father and her husband replaces the female thread connecting the heroine to her mother. Furthermore, the parallelism between the female connection and the male link suggests that this should be read in terms of father/son continuity with ophidian overtones. In one French variant, the heroine hides from her wooing father within a golden bull; then the ill neighbouring prince craves for precisely such a bull, in which the princess’s father consequently sends him the live resemblance of his own departed wife (Cosquin 1978, no. 28). According to a Greek version of this plot, the father grants the heroine to a dragon in whose mansion she delivers a wounded prince. Then she hides in a golden box until the dragon allows her hiding place (and herself within) to be sent to the prince’s palace (Cox 1893, 366-67). Put together, these two versions disclose an underlying continuity between the old man and the young one who replaces the former in marrying the juvenile avatar of the deceased wife (cf. Tatar 1987, 152). They also suggest (cf. Holbek 1987, 425-26) an identity between the father and the dragon as inappropriate suitors who (despite themselves) give away the object of their wooing to a lawful husband.

But then, the prince who slays dragons as a blue bull emanating from the princess’s father should also partake of the dragon’s essence. Indeed, his bull shape is to be related to the Russian Dragon Slayer who appears as a young “bull” begotten in a cow by a “pike with golden wings” (Afanas'ev 1980, 234-49) standing for the king of the sea, i.e. the aquatic dragon (Parsons 1923, 1: no. 88A; Afanas'ev 1980, 79-85), which an Irish version correlatively describes as a winged fish (Glassie 1985, 267-69). We are thus back to the idea that the dragon slayer and its victim are but one. Hence, Cinderella’s prince appears as an implicit dragon slayer, in accordance with the idea that to disenchant an ophidian bride and to slay the enchanting dragon are equivalent acts. A close proximity between the princess (rescued from the dragon equivalent to a father wooer) and her wooer (emanating from a dragon father) comes then to the fore. It thus becomes apparent that there is no discontinuity between the dragon father and the serpent mother, the bull and the cow, or the bridegroom and the bride figuring opposite aspects of a complex entity rejuvenated, from an ophidian or horned condition, into human shape. The “Cinderella” cycle

comprises, therefore, a male as well as a female axis of rejuvenation in overall ophidian and incestuous – androgynous, to be more exact – overtones. Is Cinderella, then, a serpent killer?

Cinderella the dragon slayer

There is a troubling dimension to the heroine that is reminiscent of the young witch at the Castle of No Return. In a Spanish variant (Espinosa 1946, no. 112), Cinderella goes to the ball through the chimney. This is not a neutral detail, since fairies would generally enter and exit houses through chimneys (Grimm 1882, 413) – and so would night-witches. An Irish version presents a heroine who inherits of the powers of a witch, and whose dead mother appears to her in the shape of a cat (Yeats 1890, 194-210). This is significant, as in two French versions the heroine gives birth to a black cat (Luzel 1996, 3: 95-99, 101-20) which fights the witch helper of his mother's stepmother – assimilated to a snake – by water, wind, and fire (101-20). Of course, this heroine with a cat mother and a cat son is herself the Hearth-Cat in the Balkans, Italy, the Iberian peninsula, and – as Anna Rooth suggests – probably beyond (Rooth 1951, 113-14).

Now add to the close connection of cats and serpents in folklore (Sébillot 1983a, 78, 307; 1984, 106) the fact that the Greek name for Earth-Cat is really a compound of “ashes” and “pudenda” with a connotation of “whore” (Rooth 1951, 112; Belmont 1989, 24-25), which is also clearly attested in Italy (Perco 1989, 41, 45). Nicole Belmont reads in these specifications a fiery sexual latency – which is likely enough – and connects this to an underlying incest theme (1989, 20-26). Indeed, the whole unsettling connotation directly relates to the fact that the heroine is responsible for her mother's death (Rooth 1951, 62, 214). The nexus of this conception is made apparent by a Spanish version in which a childless wife entreats Saint Anthony to give her a white, black, and red daughter, then dies in childbirth after extorting from her husband the promise to remarry, but someone just like herself (Espinosa 1946, no.110). The daughter appears then as a manifestation of the mother, who must therefore die. The two inevitable consequences – encompassing the whole “Cinderella” cycle – are that the father will attempt to marry the revamped version of his wife, or else will marry another woman whose jealousy towards her reincarnate rival knows no bounds. The ominous sexual latency of the heroine refers, then, to a virtual incest as logically derived from the theme of mother/daughter continuity.

In keeping with the fact that the mother must retreat to shadows as the daughter comes to light, an underlying matricidal theme comes to the fore whenever mother enters the stage. Thus, in and around the Italian and Balkan peninsulas – but also in Ireland (Yeats 1890, 194-210) – the mother is explicitly murdered. While, it is true, the two elder sisters are often blamed for the matricidal act itself (Angelopoulou 1989, 71-75; Rooth 1951, 62, 214-16; Xanthakou 1988, 9-13), by other accounts the heroine plainly kills her mother (Giacomo-Marsellesi 1989, 97-99, 123-27). Let us take a closer look at different versions of this matricide that coexist in the Balkan regions.

One variation has it that, as a number of girls stand spinning around a deep rift in the ground, a white-bearded old man warns them that whosoever drops her spindle into the chasm will be the cause of her own mother's transformation into a cow. The most beautiful girl drops her spindle, and as she returns home, her mother is indeed a cow (Wratislaw 1889, no. 37). Another variant presents a girl who eats cotton all the time. Despite the fact that people in the village warn her that she will thus cause her mother's transformation, she

keeps on eating cotton; mother becomes a cow (Xanthakou 1988, 9-11). Then the story unfolds in a form close to that known in the Iberian peninsula: father remarries, the girl is allotted impossible spinning tasks as she is sent to tend the cattle, the mother/cow chews the raw material and presents it finely spun. As the stepmother discovers this, she arranges for the cow to be killed. The heroine refuses to eat any of the animal's meat, but collects, buries, and (in Greece) incinerates the bones for forty days. Later on, Cinderella gets from the buried bones marvellous dresses that lead her into marriage (see also Cox 1893, no. 31, 54).

Other versions replace the stepmother by two elder sisters. By these accounts, a poor widowed mother and her three daughters spin every night in order to make a wretched living. The eldest daughter proposes that they kill, turn into a cow, and then eat the next one to break her thread (other versions say: drop her spindle). Mother does it twice, but the elder sisters in turn forgive her. The third time, however, they turn her into a cow, which the youngest daughter visits every day in the fields. Then the elder ones kill the cow (Xanthakou 1988, 11-13). A variant has it that the daughters collectively spare the mother twice for having carried them in the womb and having suckled them from her breast, but then – as the thread breaks a third time – the two elder sisters kill and eat their mother (Paton 1901, no. 19). However, in no case will the younger sister touch her mother's meat. Instead, she collects the bones, puts them in the earth, incinerates them for forty days, and finds there the marvellous dresses that will take her into marriage (see also Cox 1893, no. 17, 50, 53, 124).

While in the first set of variants the only daughter is clearly responsible for her mother's transformation and subsequent death, in the second set the elder sisters propose the lethal game and kill the old woman. Note, however, that they slay the mother – spared in turn by the two elder sisters – in the third daughter's turn to forgive her. One daughter, or three sisters in contrasted ways, are then responsible for the mother's transformation and death. Once more, we see the workings of the triune/dual concept. Moreover, three sister spinners as one entity that allots/cuts destiny – a well-known figure throughout Europe under different names (Grimm 1882, 405-16) – spell out the works of Fate as embodied, in Greece, by the *Moirai*: three sisters who respectively spin, allot, and cut the thread of destiny (Xanthakou 1988, 21). In modern Greece, as John Lawson points out, the association of the Fates with spinning operations is still vivid in popular phrases that compare “life to a thread. ‘His thread is cut’ or ‘is finished’ ... is a popular euphemism for ‘he is dead’” (1964, 124).

In pagan times the power of the Fates was considered stronger than that of the mightiest gods (Lawson 1964, 122, 130; Kerényi 1998, 32, 41; cf. Davidson 1975, 184), and throughout the ages those sisters, collectively called the “Spinners” (*Klothes*), have spun the days of human life. Appropriately, the “eldest of them is called Klotho. The second is called Lachesis, ‘the Apportioner,’ the third Atropos, ‘the Inevitable,’” since – inevitably – the one day is that of death. This is why Fate, when represented by a single *Moirai*, is pointedly qualified as “‘strong,’ ‘hard to endure’ and ‘destroying,’” and *Moro* is one word for Death (Kerényi 1998, 32-33). Therefore, both Klotho and Atropos stand – so their names tell us – for the overall *spinning* unit that brings about the *inevitable*, and thus they tend to overlap: Atropos – the youngest – being also said to be “the smallest in stature but the oldest and most powerful” (Kerényi 1998, 33; cf. Grimm 1882, 409, 414). Furthermore, in a detailed description, Plato interlocks the single and triune images in a

picture of two generations, as he depicts the three Moirai as Daughters of Necessity on whose knees the spindle turns while the daughters sing destiny (*The Republic*, 617).

This is interesting because, in the fairy tale variants, to drop the spindle amounts (for mother) to breaking the thread of destiny. Furthermore, this becomes lethal in connection with the third spinner, that is when Necessity and the Inevitable meet: *then* “she *had* to be killed” (Paton 1901, 200, my emphasis). In the fairy tale, understood in the light of the perennial image of Fates, elder sisters carrying out the “part” of the third (identified to an “elder” sister) thus bring about the Inevitable Necessity that links a displaced mother and a replacing daughter. In other words, the Greek variants convey through the image of Fate the destined continuity between a mother and a daughter in terms of a common thread. In one set of variants, mother’s life is indeed cut as she breaks her thread in the third spinner’s assigned turn to cut the thread of life. In the other set of variants, one daughter who drops her spindle or eats cotton performs the very acts that later lead her mother into acting as a cow spindle from which unfolds her daughter’s destiny (cf. Xanthakou 1988, 58), then into the underworld from which the woven garments accomplish that destiny through marriage. Overall, identical acts therefore define a daughter’s spinning of mother’s death and a mother’s spinning of her daughter’s life, since a common thread – cut for the mother – is spun out for the daughter, then “knotted” into marriage, whereby a girl becomes a mother.

Now, the expression “spinning sisters” accurately describes both the old Fates and later fairies (Saintyves 1923, 14), whose name *fatae* is indeed unambiguously bound up with *fatum* (Grimm 1882, 417). For instance, in modern Portuguese, *fada* designates both Fate in the impersonal sense and the Fairies – usually appearing in trios – who bestow fate (Vasconcelos 1980, 289-91; cf. Sébillot 1983a, 278). Thus, after the Iberian avatar of Cinderella washes the slain cow’s entrails and follows something “falling down the water” she meets three fairies (*fadas*), who fate (*fadam*) her to have three beautiful attributes (Pedroso 1984, no. 18). By other accounts, the dying mother herself bestows such three marvellous qualities on her daughter, hence made to resemble her (Espinosa 1946, no. 111, 113; Pedroso 1984, no. 23). Since Iberian fairies dwelling underwater are then homologous to the dead mother and correspond to Mother Holle within her well (see above), we are back to the previous discussion on bird-fairies as serpents. Indeed, Jacob Grimm – who notices the similarity between “the weaving of the norns and the spindle of fays” – goes on to note, “their appearing suddenly, their hunting of wells and springs accord with the notions of antiquity about Frau Holda, Berhta and the like goddesses” (1882, 416). Among these he places Arie (412 n. 1), the goose-footed fairy who turns into a winged serpent – a “fairy-serpent” (Christinger 1965, 120) – called *vouivre*, that is a dragon (Sébillot 1983a, 280-81; 1983b, 43-44, 135-36).

The identification of Cinderella and her mother with the Moirai is, then, one specific instance of their general assimilation to *fatae*, fairies. Consequently, the underlying images of a renewed thread of destiny and of a cast serpent skin are equivalent ways of expressing the constant notion of mother/daughter continuity. In this perspective it is surely significant that – as Claude Gaignebet perceptively remarked – traditional Greek distaffs, made of a curved horn ending in carved snake heads, very precisely yield the image of a serpent covered with wool; that is, a horned serpent (Gaignebet and Florentin 1974, 78-79). Furthermore, the dresses transmitted from the dead mother’s imperishable bones to the young daughter sometimes represent the same cosmic layers (sky, earth, and sea – Cox 1893, 245; Xanthakou 1988, 12-13) embraced by the Tower of the Ill Hour, where a

conversion - through death - of an old woman into a young bride is likewise operated. For, overall, the image of a broken thread spun anew into marriage is indeed equivalent to that of an old skin shed before marriage.

It remains to note that the underlying image of a horned serpent, or dragon, reminds us that a spindle dropped into the underground causes mother to be buried as a *horned* animal. A similar chthonic connotation is moreover conveyed, in Scottish versions, through the idea that the slain helping animal – a horned grey sheep, or yet a little black lamb that appears as the heroine is made to watch a hole – “came alive again, but she was lame” (Campbell 1890, 1: 301; Blind 1889, 25-26). Horns (like lameness) represent a principle of *balane* between different realms (cf. Gaignebet and Florentin 1974, 135-36, 158-61; Ginzburg 1991, 226-49), and have from times immemorial been associated with snake symbolism (Gimbutas 1982, 64-65, 91-101; 1989, 75-79, 131-34, 265-75, etc.; Harrison 1992, 431-32, 495). Thus the killing and transformation of Cinderella’s mother into a cow to be slain, then into a young bride (arising, as it were, from the cow’s/mother’s remains) is but one instance of an overall symbolism of self-rejuvenation linked to the horned snake.

Conclusion

One may then say that conspicuous evidence for the Dragon slayer as “Cinderella” fits with the hidden reality of Cinderella as “Dragon slayer.” As the identity of both themes reveals a complex symbolic system, one lesson to be drawn is, perhaps, that semantic harmonies which wither in separation thrive whenever replaced in the overall workings of a chorus of themes ceaselessly responding to one another. Indeed, it is as Propp proposed to consider all fairy tales derive from a single source that he acknowledged “certain abstract representations” and glimpsed at the possibility of *interpreting* tales (1968, 89-90). Furthermore, as this author proposed that the “entire store of fairy tales ought to be examined as a *chain* of variants” he asserted that, by unfolding “the picture of transformations,” one would be satisfied that all tales could be deduced from the “Dragon Slayer” theme (1968, 114).

The present paper concurs with this “very bold assertion” (loc. cit.). More precisely, it suggests that the cyclic unfoldment of discontinuous entities from undivided (ophidian) sources and back again into primordial unity, identified throughout the foregoing analysis, is to be taken as a basic symbolic pattern of the immense (but coiling) chain of European fairy tales. The broad outlines of a complex worldview (see Erdész 1984; Dundes, 1995), largely based on metaphysical assumptions, thus emerge as one relinquishes the practice of splitting fairy tales into as many parts as necessary to render them meaningless.

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Pepelko - Ubijalec zmaja

Francisco Vaz da Silva

Članek obravnava zelo znani pravljici "Ubijalca zmaja" (Aath 300) in "Pepelko" (Aath 510). Avtor je s poglobljeno raziskavo ugotovil, da junak, ki ubije zmaja, pogosto kaže jasne Pepelkine poteze in je nekakšna moška verzija Pepelke, torej Pepelko. Vendar je bilo potrebno razložiti povezavo obeh ustaljenih paradigem: aktivnega junaka in trpeče junakinje. Ko pričujoča razprava poskuša razrešiti ta problem, izhaja iz predpostavke, da razlage, ki se zatekajo k stališču kontaminacije, v resnici ne morejo veliko razložiti in da mora biti velika paleta sorodnosti motivike med "Ubijalcem zmaja" in "Pepelko" pojasnjena zunaj empiričnega nivoja, na katerem gradijo tako imenovane "analize kontaminacije".

Zato je avtor izdelal alternativno metodologijo. Najprej je bil izveden poizkus izdelave modela iberske verzije "Ubijalca zmaja", temelječe na iberskem gradivu, pri katerem pa empirične podobnosti s "Pepelko" očitno manjkajo. Potem je bil, še vedno izhajajoč iz iberskih podatkov, hkrati pa v veliki meri upoštevajoč tradicijo drugih regij, izdelan model osrednje teme "Pepelkinega ciklusa" v vseevropskem merilu. Primerjava obeh modelov je pokazala, da "Pepelkin ciklus" in "ciklus Ubijalca zmaja" z vidika komplementarnosti reflektirata skupno semantično polje, in da je z drugimi besedami tako "Ubijalec zmaja" kot "Pepelka" le ena polovica celotne slike, ki predstavlja "Pepelko" v vlogi "Ubijalca zmaja".

Ko si avtor prizadeva odkriti identiteto obeh tem, se mu razkrije kompleksni simbolični sistem in njegova analiza, kot se zdi, potrjuje Proppovo "zelo pogumno izjavo", da, če odvijemo "sliko transformacij" pravljic, ki so nanizane v verigi variant, s presenečenjem ugotovimo, da bi bile lahko vse pravljice izpeljane iz skupne teme "Ubijalca zmaja". Natančneje torej: v članku je izpostavljeno, da moramo ciklično ločevanje prekinjenih enot od osnovnega vira nazaj v prvobitno jedro jemati za temeljni simbolični vzorec ogromne verige evropskih pravljic. Široki obrisi kompleksnega pogleda na svet pridejo na dan z ublažitvijo klasifikacijskih predpostavk in z opuščanjem razdelitve pravljic na toliko delov, kot je potrebno, da jih naredimo brez pomena.