GRIMM LEGACIES

The Magic Spell of the Grimms' Folk and Fairy Tales

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EPILOGUE

A Curious Legacy: Ernst Bloch's Enlightened View of the Fairy Tale and Utopian Longing, or Why the Grimms' Tales Will Always Be Relevant

Certainly good dreams can go too far. On the other hand, don't the simple fairy-tale dreams remain too far behind? Of course, the fairy-tale world, especially as a magical one, no longer belongs to the present. How can it mirror our wish projections against a background that has long since disappeared? Or, to put it a better way: How can the fairy tale mirror our wish-projections other than in a totally obsolete way? Real kings no longer even exist. The atavistic and simultaneously feudal-transcendental world from which the fairy tale stems and to which it seems to be tied has most certainly vanished. However, the mirror of the fairy tale has not become opaque, and the manner of wish-fulfillment that peers forth from it is not entirely without a home. It all adds up to this: the fairy tale narrates a wish-fulfillment that is not bound by its own time and the apparel of its contents. In contrast to the legend, which is always tied to a particular locale, the fairy tale remains unbound.[1]

—Ernst Bloch, "The Fairy Tale Moves on Its Own in Time"

It is significant that two of the greatest minds in German intellectual history, Ernst Bloch (1885–1977), the great philosopher of hope, and Theodor Adorno (1903–69), the foremost critical thinker of the Frankfurt School, contributed to the Grimms' cultural legacy by exploring the profound ramifications of the fairy tale.[2] Both were amply familiar with the Grimms' tales. Both had escaped the Nazi nightmare by fleeing to America in the early 1940s and then had returned to East and West Germany respectively in the late 1940s with the intention of helping rebuild two different kinds of Germanies, which laid claims to represent the genuine cultural heritage of Germany. Bloch and Adorno had not met while in America. It was only in 1964 that they encountered each other in Frankfurt

am Main, and their views on politics and literature were very different. Nevertheless, in this one encounter, late in their lives, they came together to discuss the nature of utopian longing with surprising results.

In fact, it was not long after Bloch escaped the dystopian realm of East Germany in 1961 that he held a fascinating radio discussion with Adorno about the contradictions of utopian longing. Bloch had been somewhat disappointed by the socialist experiment in East Germany that he had experienced from 1949 to 1961, and Adorno had become a major critic of the culture industry in postwar western societies and was disappointed by the commercialization of art and literature. Their conversation was intriguing because, at times, Adorno sounded more like a utopian thinker than Bloch. Moreover, both displayed an unusual interest in fairy tales and were very familiar with the Grimms' tales, which they considered to be utopian. To be sure, Adorno questioned the concept of utopia in his usual incisive manner, but he seemed to share Bloch's faith in utopia and yet to be very disillusioned about genuine possibilities for the realization of utopian longings, while Bloch continued to be more hopeful about the future of utopia, despite the fact that his own hope had been disappointed by East Germany and the Soviet bloc.

In his opening statement Adorno, very much in keeping with his critique of the culture industry,[3] asserted that utopian dreams had been fulfilled in a way that leads to deception and monotony:

> The fulfillment of the wishes takes something away from the substance of the wishes, as in the fairy tale where the farmer is granted three wishes, and, I believe, he wishes his wife to have a sausage on her nose and then must use the second wish to have the sausage removed from her nose.[4] In other words, I mean that one can watch television (*fernsehen*) today, look at the things that are far away, but instead of the wish-image providing access to the erotic utopia, one sees in the best of circumstances some kind of more or less pretty pop singer, who continues to deceive the spectator in regard to her prettiness insofar as she sings some kind of nonsense instead of showing it, and this song generally consists in bringing together "roses" with "moonlight" in harmony. Above and beyond this, one could perhaps say in general that the fulfillment of utopia consists largely only in a repetition of the continually same "today."[5]

Bloch was not entirely in agreement with Adorno and maintained that the wish-images of utopia had not been entirely emptied or banalized. "There is still a much older level of utopias that we should not forget," he responded,

> that *we least of all* should not forget—the fairy tale. The fairy tale is not only filled with social utopia, in other words, with the utopia of a better life and justice, but it is also filled with technological utopia, most of all in the oriental fairy tales. In the fairy tale "The Magic Horse," from the *Arabian Nights*, there is a "helicopter." One can read the *Arabian Nights* in many places as a manual for inventions. Bacon addresses this and then sets himself off from the fairy tale by saying that what *he* means, the real magic, relates to the oldest wish-images of the fairy tale as the deeds of Alexander relate to the deeds of King Arthur's Round Table. Thus, the content of the utopian images change according to the social situation.[6]

Indeed, Bloch insisted that the content always changes over time, but the longing for a better life and justice would always remain and indicate what is missing in life. Utopian longing keeps generating wish-images that must be examined and judged critically and individually as to whether they allow for the possibility of realization. The formation of utopias that stem from longing not only offers a critique of reality, but it also opens up possible alternatives. It is because possibility challenges and subverts the status quo of society that it is treated poorly and neglected by ruling elites. Yet, possibility as a philosophical category must be regarded seriously, and both Bloch and Adorno agreed that the utopian wish-image, even when it is false, conveys a critique of what is present and points at the same time to what could and should be.

At the end of their conversation, Bloch discussed the principle of hope and its relationship to perfection. "But what is valid is that each and every criticism of perfection, incompleteness, intolerance, and impatience already without a doubt presupposes the conception of, and longing for, a possible perfection."[7] This hope for perfection, however, does not provide confidence or security. "Hope is critical and can be disappointed. However, hope still nails a flag on the mast, even in decline, in that the decline is not accepted, even when this decline is still very strong. Hope is not confidence. Hope is surrounded by dangers, and it is the consciousness of danger and at the same time the determined negation of that which continually makes the opposite of the hoped-for object possible."[8]

Even though Adorno appeared to agree with Bloch by the end of the radio conversation, we cannot really consider him a "hopeful" philosopher, and he certainly did not embrace the hope of the student and anti-authoritarian movement at the end of the 1960s, when he unfortunately died from a heart attack. On the other hand, Bloch supported this movement and never abandoned the principle of hope throughout his life; he sought traces of it everywhere—in high and low culture, in mass movements of protest, in technology, music, art, and

daily customs and habits. More than any genre, however, it was in the fairy tale that he most often found wishful-images of hope. He frequently used it to illustrate the utopian longing and creativity of human beings and the possibilities to change the world that it represented. This is undoubtedly why Adorno had brought up the topic of the fairy tale early in their conversation, and it is also why Bloch almost immediately referred to it as representative of utopia. But what was it exactly about the fairy tale that induced Bloch to use it constantly as a utopian example? After all, the fairy tale is often associated with escapist fantasies, irrelevant in philosophy and politics, and a genre of writing and telling primarily intended for children. In fact, the traditional fairy tales of Charles Perrault, the Brothers Grimm, and Hans Christian Andersen are filled with tendencies that can be considered elitist, sexist, and racist. Did Bloch, who was born into the land of the Grimms, really understand what a fairy tale was? Did he have a misconception of this genre and place too much value on its utopian potential?

Bloch wrote two complete essays dedicated to the fairy tale that are worthwhile examining for an understanding of why the fairy tale was so vital for his philosophy of hope: "The Fairy Tale Moves on Its Own in Time" ("Das Märchen geht selber in der Zeit," 1930) and "Better Castles in the Sky at the Country Fairy and Circus, in Fairy Tales and Colportage" ("Bessere Luftschlösser in Jahrmarkt und Zirkus, in Märchen und Kolportage," 1959, included in *Prinzip Hoffnung*). In each case Bloch was not concerned with the literary or literary historical meaning of the fairy tale, but its philosophical and social implications and relationship to his principle of hope.

In "The Fairy Tale Moves on Its Own in Time," he immediately points to the unique quality of the fairy tale, often citing the Grimms' tales. Though the wish-fulfillment of the fairy tale may appear to be obsolete and depict feudal kingdoms with kings and queens, it transcends time and place. " Not only does the fairy tale remain as fresh as longing and love, but the demonically evil, which is abundant in the fairy tale, is still seen at work here in the present, and the happiness of 'once upon a time,' which is even more abundant, still affects our visions of the future."[9]

For Bloch, the fairy tale in all its forms, ancient and modern, remains vibrant and touches the dreams and wishes of common people who want to overcome the dreariness of their daily lives. The appeal of the fairy tale, no matter what its form may be, is boundless because its tendency or tendentiousness indicates the possibility for change and the fulfillment of dreams. Bloch discusses works by Jean Cocteau, Ferenc Molnár, and Jules Verne that are not exactly fairy tales but represent the modernization of fairy tales in Bloch's own time—that is, the time of 1930, a year after the Great Depression had erupted:

> What is significant about such kinds of modern fairy tales is that it is reason itself that leads to the wish projections of the old fairy tales and serves them. Again what proves itself is a harmony with courage and cunning, as that earliest kind of enlightenment which already characterizes "Hansel and Gretel": consider yourself as born free and entitled to be totally happy, dare to make use of your power of reasoning, look upon the outcome of things as friendly. These are the genuine maxims of fairy tales, and fortunately for us they appear not only in the past but in the now. Unfortunately we must equally contend with the smoke of witches and the blows of ogres habitually faced by the fairy-tale hero in the now.[10]

About thirty years later, in 1959, Bloch picked up the theme of cunning and courage in his second essay and continued to write about it: "Despite the fantastic side of the fairy tale, it is always cunning in the way it overcomes difficulties. Moreover, courage and cunning in fairy tales succeed in an entirely different way than in life, and not only that: it is, as Lenin says, always the existing revolutionary elements that tie the given strings of the story together here." [11] Bloch uses many of the fairy tales collected and edited by the Brothers Grimm as examples in which we can find heroes such as peasants, tailors, soldiers, simpletons, who become "enlightened" and knowingly overcome oppressive tyrants such as kings, ogres, witches, and so on. At one point he states:

> But the fairy tale does not allow itself to be fooled by the present owners of paradise. Thus, it is a rebellious, burned child and alert. One can climb a beanstalk up into heaven and then see how angels made gold. In the fairy tale "Godfather Death," the Lord God himself offers to be the godfather in a poor man's family, but the poor man responds, "I don't want you as a godfather because you give to the rich and let the poor starve." Here and everywhere, in the courage, the sobriety and hope, there is a piece of the Enlightenment that emerged long before there was such a thing as the Enlightenment. The brave little tailor in the Grimms' fairy tale kills flies in his home and goes out into the world because he feels that his workshop is too small for his bravery. He meets a giant who takes a rock in his hand and squeezes it with such strength that water drips from it. Then he throws another rock so high that into the air that one can barely see it. However, the tailor outsmarts the giant by squeezing a piece of cheese into pulp instead of a rock, and next he throws a bird so high into the air that it never returns.

> Finally, at the end of the fairy tale, the clever tailor overcomes all obstacles and wins the king's daughter and half the kingdom. This is the way a tailor is made into a king in the fairy tale, a king without taboos, who has gotten rid of all the hostile maliciousness of the great people.[12]

Fairy-tale heroes perceive how to take advantage of all kinds of magical or wish instruments that benefit their struggles. In this essay, which is much longer than "The Fairy Tales Moves On in Its Own Time," Bloch refers to a broad array of fairy tales written by Edgar Allen Poe, Wilhelm Hauff, E.T.A. Hoffmann, Gottfried Keller, Selma Lagerlöff, and Rudyard Kipling to demonstrate how they open up wondrous views and send their protagonists on adventures that break down boundaries and reveal how possible the impossible can be. Rarely do the dreams of the adventurers go unfulfilled in these literary fairy tales that stem from a profound oral tradition based on how adults viewed the world.

For Bloch, who always made unusual if not startling associations in his thinking, there is a connection between the wish-images of the fairy tales and the sideshows at country fairs and the performances at the circus. The sensational images in the sideshow or the circus tent, like the miraculous events in the fairy tale, cannot be replicated. Yet they leave behind an indelible impression in the imagination of spectators. Though the scenes and tales may seem to be nonsense, there is a deep sense to our attraction to an unusual attraction that is too easily dismissed by people who putatively possess culture and consider the circus, sideshows at the country fair, and even fairy tales as trivial, vulgar, and decadent. Bloch thinks differently:

> The age-old pleasure of people, in no way simple and no way decadent, is preserved in the fair, wanders within it and outside. There is a piece of frontier here, set at reduced admission, but with preserved meanings, with strange utopian meanings, conserved in a brutal show, in vulgar crypticness. It is a world that has not been sufficiently investigated for its specific wish areas. In particular, it is that "oddity," the kind that was last called such during the Baroque period, that keeps itself above water here, above land.[13]

By bringing together the fairy tale with sideshows of the country fair and the performances in circus rings, Bloch intended to demonstrate how all popular culture has traces and remnants of utopian longing. This is why he concludes this essay by discussing colportage, the cheap adventure novels and stories, that became popular in the latter part of the nineteenth century and prepared the way

for all kinds of "low-brow" romances, adventure stories, criminal novels, science fiction, fantasy and so on in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. "The dream of colportage is: never again to be trapped by the routine of daily life. And at the end there is: happiness, love, victory. The splendor toward which the adventure story heads is not won through a rich marriage and the like as in the magazine story but rather through an active journey to the Orient of the dream."[14]

Bloch draws comparisons between Schiller's *The Robbers* and Beethoven's *Fidelio* to demonstrate how they were liberating fairy-tale plays about rescue and liberation that formed a strong current in all kinds of colportage literature up to the present:

> Dark dungeons, pistols, signals, rescue—things in the more refined literature of the new kind never appear by themselves. These things produce one of the strongest possible tensions available: that between night and light. Accordingly, a reevaluation of this genre is especially evident on the strength of its highly legitimate wish-image in its mirror. Here, missing meanings are fresh everywhere, and those that are not missing are waiting, as in the fairy tale. . . . The fairy-tale like colportage is a castle in the sky par excellence, but one in good air, and insofar as this can at all be true about plain wish work: the castle in the sky is right. In the final analysis, it derives from the Golden Age and would like to stand in such an age again, in happiness, which pushes forward from night to light.[15]

For Bloch, the fairy tale was not a genre of escape literature but rather one of enlightenment. It is interesting to note that his own writing was metaphorical, aphoristic, and elliptical often bordering on the mystical, and the process of reading *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* can be metaphysically compared to an abstract adventure and experiment that sheds light on human struggles for revelation. The writing and telling of fairy tales depend very much the same way on symbol, allegory, surrealism, and magic realism to dispel clouds of deception and reveal enlightening ways in which oppressed and disadvantaged protagonists might triumph against cruel foes. To be sure, from a literary or folkloristic viewpoint, Bloch had a somewhat naïve and indiscriminate understanding of the fairy tale and did not distinguish between oral and literary tales or grasp them in their sociohistorical contexts. Nor did he offer careful readings of tales to study gender and racial stereotypes or how they reinforced feudal notions of power. Not every swineherd who becomes a king will use his newly achieved power to benefit other disadvantaged people. Not every peasant maiden who becomes

a queen and begins bearing children will be autonomous and live happily ever after. Not every fairy tale possesses a utopian tendency. Bloch often simplifies how fairy tales are received by the reading and viewing public. For instance, many fairy tales divert audiences and "blind" them so that they do not gain enlightenment. Fairy tales are made for fun and profit. One could argue that the manner in which Disney appropriated and adapted fairy tales for the cinema and also for book publishing, tales that stem from the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, did not shed light on liberating possibilities for common people but perverted their utopian longings and channeled them so they have become better consumers. Louis Marin has written a scintillating and scathing study of how Disney manipulated fairy-tale elements and motifs to create a utopic degeneration[16] that exploits genuine utopian longings. There is no light in the Disneylands spread across the globe, only darkness and banality. Bloch, in contrast to Adorno, placed much too much faith in the fairy tale as a beacon of light that contained an anticipatory illumination (*Vor-Schein*) of utopia, just as he placed much too much faith in much of commodified art to offer a glow of possible change.

Nevertheless, Bloch did have a profound insight about the genre of the fairy tale, which is one of the most unique forms of storytelling that pervades almost all art forms today—including TV sitcoms, advertisements, toys, garments, fantasy literature, films, paintings, sculptures, poetry, Internet sites, and so on. Whether a fairy tale is progressive—illuminates contradictions in a fictitious realm and tendentiously sides with the oppressed—or regressive—reinforces conservative notions of the status quo by furthering elitist ideas of hegemony even if disadvantaged people rise to the top—the genre continually brings out what is missing in most people's lives. The constant repetition of the fairy-tale maxims is not always and necessarily what Adorno asserted it to be, a banalization of utopia or homogenization of daily life, but rather represents a persistent refusal to accept life as it is and a demand that utopian longings be fulfilled. There is indeed something still missing, deeply missing even when people buy into deception. The emptiness of life is projected through the flaccid happy fulfillments of the fairy tale in all art forms, high and low, and these banal happy fulfillments show paradoxically that people deeply feel how much is still missing and that the temporary "plug of happiness" will not stop the longing. I believe that the Grimms felt this as well and turned to the ancient folk and fairy tales in an endeavor to fill something that was missing in their lives and keeps missing.

In this sense Bloch and Adorno are strange heirs to the Grimms' legacy of folk and fairy tales. Both Bloch and Adorno agreed that something was missing in contemporary society—had always been missing—that engendered utopian longing. Adorno tried to elaborate a theory of negative dialectics in his *Aesthetic*

Theory toward the end of his life, and it is clearly why he proposed to Bloch that "at any rate utopia is essentially in the determined negation, in the determined negation of that which merely is, and by concretizing itself as something false, it always points at the same time to what should be."[17] Though Bloch felt that the world had become completely devoid of a utopian conscience and utopian presentiment, he believed that "utopia cannot be removed from the world in spite of everything, and even the technological, which must definitely emerge and will be in the great realm of the utopian, will form only small sectors." In other words, utopia was not only in the determined negation but in the anticipatory illumination. Glimmers of hope for this utopia were projected and are projected through the fairy tale, but the conditions for its realization must be adequate. As Bloch wryly stated toward the end of his conversation with Adorno, "People must first fill their stomachs, and then they can dance. That is a *condition sine qua non* for being able to talk earnestly about the other without it being used for deception. Only when all the guests have sat down at the table can the Messiah, can Christ come. Thus, Marxism in its entirety, even when conveyed in its most illuminating form and anticipated in its entire realization, is only a *condition* for life in freedom, life in happiness, life in possible fulfillment, life with content."[18]

12. Ibid., 41–42.
13. Ibid., 42.
14. Ibid., 43.
15. Ibid., 164.
16. Liz Hoggard, "Helen Oyeyemi: 'I'm Interested in the Way Women Disappoint One Another,'" interview in the Saturday edition of *The Guardian/Observer*, March 1, 2014. http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/mar/02/helen-oyeyemi-women-disappoint-one-another.
17. Carolyn Turgeon, "A Conversation with Carolyn Turgeon," *The Fairest of Them All* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2013): unpaginated at the end of the book.
18. Adam Gidwitz, *A Tale Dark & Grimm* (New York: Dutton, 2010): 2.
19. Ibid., 3.
20. Adam Gidwitz, *In a Glass Grimmly* (New York: Dutton, 2012): 316.
21. Adam Gidwitz, *The Grimm Conclusion* (New York: Dutton, 2013): 341.
22. Alice Miller, *The Body Never Lies: The Lingering Effects of Cruel Parenting*, trans. Andrew Jenkins (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005).
23. Rikki Ducornet, *The Complete Butcher's Tales* (Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1994): 139.
24. Sara Maitland, *Far North and Other Dark Tales* (London: Maia Press, 2008).
25. Sara Maitland, *Gossip from the Forest: The Tangled Roots of Our Forests and Fairytales* (London: Granta, 2012). The American edition published in 2012 by Counterpoint in Berkeley, California, has a different title: *From the Forest: A Search for the Hidden Roots of Our Fairy Tales*. I am not certain why Maitland made this change, but I prefer the original title.
26. Ibid., 100–101.
27. Eva Figes, *Tales of Innocence and Experience: An Exploration* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003): 182.
28. Jeanne Marie Beaumont and Claudia Carlson, *The Poets' Grimm: 20th Century Poems from Grimm Fairy Tales* (Ashland, OR: Story Line Press, 2003): 258–59.
29. Ibid., 260.
30. Ibid., 260.
31. Ron Koertge, *Lies, Knives, and Girls in Red Dresses*, illustr. Andrea Deszö (Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press, 2012): i.
32. Ibid., 33.
33. Ibid., 54.
34. Jane Yolen, *The Last Selchie Child* (New York: A Midsummer Night's Press, 2012): 9.
35. Lawrence Schimmel, *Fairy Tales for Writers* (New York: A Midsummer Night's Press, 2007): 8.
36. Cornelia Hoogland, *Woods Wolf Girl* (Hamilton, Ontario: Wolsak and Wynn, 2011): 7.
37. Ibid., 76.
38. Ava Leavell Haymon, *Why the House Is Made of Gingerbread* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010): 52.

Epilogue. A Curious Legacy: Ernst Bloch's Enlightened View of the Fairy Tale and Utopian Longing, or Why the Grimms' Tales Will Always Be Relevant

1. "The Fairy Tale Moves on Its Own Time," in Ernst Bloch, *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature: Selected Essays*, trans. Jack Zipes and Frank Mecklenburg (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988): 163.
2. Bloch is famous for his three-volume work, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1954–59); *The Principle of Hope*, trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986). Among Adorno's notable works are *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, written with Max Horkheimer (Amsterdam: Querido, 1947); *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972); *Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1966);

Negative Dialectics, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Seabury, 1966); *Ästhetische Theorie*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970); *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hubert-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997)

3. For an excellent collection of Adorno's various essays on the culture industry, see Theodor Adorno, *The Culture Industry*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (London: Routledge, 1991).
4. Actually, Adorno is mistaken about the incidents in this tale. He is referring to Charles Perrault's "The Foolish Wishes" ("Les souhaits ridicules," 1694), in which a poor woodcutter is given three wishes by Jupiter. He stupidly wastes the first one by wishing for a sausage. After his wife berates him, he wishes for a sausage on her nose. Finally, as his third wish, he asks that the sausage be removed from his wife's nose.
5. "Something's Missing: A Discussion between Ernst Bloch and Theodor W. Adorno on the Contradictions of Utopian Longing (1964)," in Ernst Bloch, *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature: Selected Essays*, trans. Jack Zipes and Frank Mecklenburg (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988): 1–2. See "Etwas fehlt . . . Über die Widersprüche der utopischen Sehnsucht. Ein Gespräch mit Theodor W. Adorno (1964)," in *Gespräche mit Ernst Bloch*, eds. Rainer Traub and Harald Wieser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975): 58–59.
6. Ibid., 5.
7. Ibid., 16.
8. Ibid, 16–17.
9. Bloch, "The Fairy Tale Moves on Its Own in Time," 163.
10. Ibid., 165–66.
11. Ibid., 168–69.
12. Ibid., 169.
13. Ibid., 182.
14. Ibid., 183.
15. Ibid., 184.
16. Louis Marin, *Utopics: Spatial Play*, trans. Robert A. Vollrath (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1984). See especially, "Utopic Degeneration: Disneyland," 239–258.
17. Ibid., 12.
18. Ibid., 15.