

THE UGLY DUCKLING, HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSON: A STORY OF TRANSFORMATION

ANITA L. GAMBOS

Introduction

The Ugly Duckling is a small story that offers universal hope to the disenfranchised. Here, a misfit, rejected by family and society, makes the microcosmic journey of all who seek self-actualization. In *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*, Jack Zipes notes in his chapter, "Hans Christian Andersen and the Discourse of the Dominated":

(The Ugly Duckling) has generally been interpreted as a parable of Andersen's own success story because the naturally gifted underdog survives a period of "ugliness" to reveal its innate beauty. (87)

Therefore, to understand the significance of the transformation, from ugly to beautiful, it is important to view the passage against the backdrop of Andersen's life.

Andersen's Life Influences

Hans Christian Andersen was clearly a product of the nineteenth century, a period of broad-sweeping changes in both world and national views, when tenets of biology, eugenics and race became subjects of public discourse.

Andersen was born to poverty in 1805 in the old provincial Danish town of Odense. The son of a cobbler who loved books and taught himself and his son to read, Andersen grew up hearing his father say that he (the father) was of aristocratic origin. Andersen's mother worked as a washerwoman; she was uneducated and superstitious, but introduced Andersen to folklore. He was also greatly influenced by his grandmother, a grounds person at Odense Hospital, a local workhouse. Andersen spent a great deal of time there listening to elderly, female inmates who repeated old stories and the traditional folk tales of Denmark. These made a deep and lasting impression.

Andersen was a poor student and received little education. He spent much of his time alone writing short plays and dreaming of becoming an actor. Encouraged by his parents, he composed his own fairy tales and arranged puppet shows. Andersen was fortunate to live in one of the few towns outside of Copenhagen that housed a public theater. He often accompanied his father to the town's playhouse.

When he was 11, Andersen's life was seriously disrupted when his father died, and the family became even more destitute. He was forced to go to work. For a short time, he apprenticed to a weaver and a tailor, and also worked at a tobacco factory. At the age of 14, he fled to Copenhagen to find his way in the theater. During his first years in Copenhagen, Andersen fought to gain a toehold in the theater as a ballet dancer, actor and singer. Eventually, he succeeded in becoming associated with the Royal Theater, but had to leave it when his voice began to change.

One of the directors of the Royal Theater, an influential government official, Jonas Collins, provided Andersen the means to be educated and eventually gain admission to Copenhagen University. These educational experiences broadened Andersen's perspective and put him in touch with the dramatic social changes of his day. Zipes notes:

Throughout the western world, a more solidified bourgeois public sphere was establishing itself and replacing feudal systems, as was clearly the case in Denmark. (76)

It might be said that Andersen in his subsequent life became living proof of the social mobility made possible by the bourgeois democracy that arose after the signing of Denmark's constitution in 1849.

After his school years, Copenhagen at last came to mean something positive for Andersen, and he began his writing in earnest. The University of Southern Denmark's Center on Hans Christian Andersen notes on its website:

Here the proletarian Andersen acquired the culture and education associated with bourgeois circles in the Golden Age that encompassed the last years of absolute monarchy. . . . Andersen's entire production of tales is, as it were, suspended between these two poles. . .

Having broken with his family and social class, but not yet a member of the moneyed class, Andersen understood that he could realize his potential and gain greater social standing only through the world of art, the only outlet the times provided. The Center's web site also remarks:

Here, too, he came to know both the bourgeois upper class of the capital and the very lowest stratum of its proletariat. He came to know the fight for survival at the subsistence level and the bitterness of being a supplicant dependent on the good will of others.

It is Zipes' s opinion that this duality produced deep self-doubts in Andersen that impelled him to constantly reprove his value.

. . . to show his aptitude and disposition were noble and that he belonged to the elect. This is apparent in the referential system built into most of his tales which are discourses on the dominated. (79)

His friends were patrons rather than intimates, and his constant sense of indebtedness to them weighed heavily and perpetuated his isolation. Throughout his life, from his own perspective and despite his fame as a writer, Andersen was the dominated subject within the dominant social circles. Andersen never felt himself to be fully accepted by any group. He lived as an outsider, a loner, unable to enjoy the deep attachments and obvious social identification that a wife and family would have bestowed.

Perhaps it is for this reason that he began to travel extensively. He considered Germany to be his second home but was also comfortable in Italy. His journeying paved the way for international literary fame as his first work published in 1829 described his trek from Holmens Canal to the east point of Amager, a fantastic tale set in the style of German Romantic writers. The work was well received. Andersen was considered to be the most widely traveled Danish writer of his day. He spent over nine years of his life outside Denmark.

Andersen's literary fame grew rapidly from the mid-1830s when his novels became widely accepted in Germany. However, from 1839 onwards, it was his fairy tales that earned him acclaim until his death in 1875. Imbedded in the straightforward narrative easily understood by children are subtler and deeper meanings to which adults respond. It is to these symbols and meanings that attention is next turned.

Understanding Tale Symbolism and Meaning

The Oxford English Dictionary defines symbol as something that stands for, represents or denotes something else; a material object representing or taken to represent something immaterial or abstract, as a being, idea, quality or condition. *Meaning* is defined as that which is intended to be or actually is expressed or indicated; the intent, the spirit.

Archeologists, seeking to discover historic and cultural meaning from artifacts, offer an evolution of symbolic capacity. The Auckland Center for the Arts notes that our physical and mental capacity for symbolic thought and its representation in language is the result of evolution. The ability to reason, plan and communicate in symbols sets us

apart from other animals. This generates our culture capacity. Therefore, the ability to derive symbolic meaning from tales helps preserve and expand the cultural underpinnings that link us all. This is one of storytelling's most important functions.

On an individual level, different cognitive maps guide personal actions. People sense/sample the world and then interpret! give meaning to, according to these cognitive maps. Just as language has an internal organization called grammar, cognitive maps are given organization and structure through sets of related symbols and meaning. Folk tales, fairy tales, myths, lore, are the organizing principles of cognitive maps. Therefore, through either the collective or the individual pathways, the symbolism of tales helps to organize the internal operating systems both for culture in general and for its singular components. Thus, the Auckland Center proposes that "approaches that look at symbols and meaning may generate coherence and sense."

In *Interpretation of Fairy Tales*, Marie Louise von Franz speaks to four basic cognitive maps for those interpreting fairy tales.

Actually you can interpret a fairy tale with any of the four functions of consciousness. The thinking type will point out the structure and the way in which all the motifs connect. The feeling type will put them into value order (a hierarchy of values) which is also completely rational. With the feeling function, a good and complete fairy tale interpretation can be made. The sensation type will just look at the symbols and amplify them. The intuitive will see the whole package (of fairy tale) in its oneness, so to speak; he will be most gifted in showing that the whole fairy tale is not a discursive story but is really *one* message split up into many facets. (24)

The cognitive map of this report will follow an intuitive interpretation of the major symbols and meaning of *The Ugly Duckling*.

Symbolic Analysis of *The Ugly Duckling*

From the very first paragraph, story symbols that evoke multiple meanings are plentiful. The opening paragraph that describes the long golden days of summer, sweet air, tall corn and freshly-cut hay leads the reader to a pastoral/earth setting, a time of fullness and ripening, a time of maturation after quickening. But, beyond the open sunlight, there are the shaded deeps (cool lakes of the unconscious where new life can be born.) Near the lake shore, storks (symbols of fertility and birth) wade. Birds (symbols of freedom that fly with new hopes and dreams of the future) chatter overhead.

Even the manmade objects like the old mansion surrounded by a

moat are contained and defined by the watery unconscious. Along the stone walls of the mansion, "huge burdock plants with leaves as big as platters grow thick and tall. Beneath their leaves it was like a secret room." (It is interesting to note that burdock leaves are usually heart-shaped near the bottom of the plant and egg-shaped at the top.) In this womb-like place, recreating the ancient mysteries, the mother duck waits for her eggs to hatch, each egg enfolding its own primeval, cosmic universe.

After the ducklings begin to hatch, "the mother let them look as much as they liked, for green is good for the eyes." (Through the connection with the green, fertile earth, all living things are made whole, and life is supported.)

The mother duck must still sit on the nest to hatch the last and largest egg. An older duck (crone/elder/shaman) cautions the mother duck that the egg could be a turkey egg (note the quality of Trickster), clearly inferior in the animal hierarchy. The mother duck was encouraged to make sure that the product of this larger egg could swim (navigate the world emotionally.)

When the Ugly Duckling hatched, he (advisedly a "he" in this case) was gray, not a golden yellow like the other ducklings. This gray duckling was suspect, "in the gray zone," not fully accepted, but not yet rejected, while the yellow ducklings, the color of sun and summer and life, were perceived as the "real ducklings."

After a swim in the moat (a journey of initiation), the mother duck cautions the ducklings to beware of the "mean old cat" living the barnyard. The cat can represent the feminine aspect of the personality, the unexplored unconscious. It is interesting to note that after the ducklings had proven themselves by *performing* in the moat (masculine activity), they were now being cautioned to pay attention to the feminine principle, the aspect of *being*. They could even find it to be dangerous.

The exhortation to pay attention to appearances is primary. The mother duck equates her worth to the perceived value that others place on her "well bred" ducklings and, commensurately, on her success as a mother. She instructs them to keep their toes turned out properly (be outward turning and explore.)

Particularly evocative is her social instruction to bow to the respected older female duck who is of Chinese heritage (ancient wisdom). She is also addressed as "Your Grace," a designation of nobility. She notes that the older duck has a bit of red cloth on her leg so that everyone would "take notice of her and treat her with respect."

Red is the color of blood, of kinship and, in some cultures, of initiation. (The ducklings were to be presented to their new tribe.) More directly, in the Chinese culture, red is the color of good fortune and abundance. (By honoring the duck of greater social standing, honor and riches might also be conferred on the mother duck and her ducklings.)

It was the old duck who commented on what a nice family the mother duckling had, but notably excluded the Ugly Duckling from this evaluation. She even went so far as to say "too bad you can't start over again with him." (Abundance will not come to the Ugly Duckling in his current form.)

On that first day, the barnyard animals' abuse of the Ugly Duckling began. (The barnyard can be equated to the town square, the gathering place of the lower classes where justice was dispensed.) Though the cat never made an appearance, the chickens and ducklings shouted that "The cat should grab you," an indication that they wanted some super natural force to intervene in the destruction/transformation of the Ugly Duckling. Early one morning (at the beginning of his quest), the Ugly Duckling ran away. Almost immediately, he encountered animals in the wild and assumed they ran/flew away because he was so ugly. The cognitive map he carried had to be tested in the wild (the subconscious) to gain the truth of his own inner map. Thus, he began a hero's journey, with the hero's task of encountering and overcoming his demons.

He first met wild birds who flew away. (His hopes, his dreams had changed.) Next, he met wild ducks who thought him strange and, curiously, said that he could remain in the marsh as long as he didn't marry into their family. (This is the psychological distancing device used to guard and protect the status quo and keep the tribe intact.)

One morning, he met a pair of young, wild geese who invited him to join them on their side of the marsh. They acknowledged his ugliness (differences), but were willing to include him in their community. (Through younger, less stultified beings, the order of the status quo begins to weaken, and messages from the unconscious arise. Hints are given to what is possible.)

Unfortunately, just as the clues are evidenced, a hunter shoots the wild geese as they fly from the rushes. (So, too, are many new ideas gunned down aggressively when they land in the sights of the guns of established thinking and tried-and-true systems like the proverbial "old boys network. ")

It was when a huge dog, "its eyes gleaming horribly," came upon the Ugly Duckling, pushing his dog's nose right into the duckling's face, then departing, that the Ugly Duckling decided to leave the swamp. (In ancient Babylon, the goddess of Fate is represented by a dog, and often, gods accompanying traveling goddesses took the forms of dogs. The dog is a sign of protection and power.) It is interesting that it was the appearance of a dog that precipitated the Ugly Duckling's hurrying out of relatively known safety to the truly unknown.

Having left the marsh (the world in-between the solid land and the watery depths), the Ugly Duckling came to a "sad-looking little farmhouse" which housed an old woman, a cat and a hen. Not seeing well, the old woman thought that the duckling was a hen and put him on a

nest in hope of his laying eggs. (Many will not see who we really are.) After a period of time, "the duckling sat in the corner feeling very, very sad. (His feelings began to match the sad environment.) Thoughts of fresh air and sunshine came to his mind, and he was filled with an extraordinary longing to swim" (to return to his true nature).

When he expressed his desire to the hen and cat, they were scornful. They encouraged him to be grateful for "a warm room and pleasant company." But the Ugly Duckling left the sure comforts of the poor farmhouse (where he would have been safe but unrealized), and set out on his own path. (The hero could not be seduced from his quest.) He came to a beautiful pond (an enclosed pool of emotional content, where he could explore his identity). He tried swimming near the other ducks, but they turned away. (The journey to self-realization is a solitary one.)

Winter (the period of frozen time and inward space, the dark night of the soul) was coming. A raven (the prophetic bird of death) squawked. (Our hero was about to go through the transformative death to self.) One evening, he saw a flock of swans fly overhead, and though he did not know their identity, he called out to them and felt strangely excited. (His intuition and his instincts were waking up, and he was beginning to know himself differently.) His voice was so loud and so shrill it frightened him. (He was afraid of embracing this new voice/identity that was emerging.)

Then he dived down to the bottom of the pond (the unconscious) and "when he came up again, he was even more excited than before." (He was willing to engage deeply for only a moment, but a moment was enough to fire his imagination and keep him alive during the upcoming wintry trial. It gave him a hint to his most secret, and his truest identity.)

Winter came. "The duckling had to swim round and round in the water to keep it from freezing right up. But every night the pool in which he swam grew smaller and smaller." (Self-actualization is not gained through a mental process. Though our minds go "round and round," transformation happens only when the circuitous thoughts get smaller and smaller, as we tire of the mind's game and let it stop.) "At last he froze fast into the pond." (We surrender to our fate, the outward, seemingly constricting construct arising from our deepest unconscious.)

It was a peasant (someone of the land) who found the duckling, "broke up the ice with his wooden clog" (a strong, sturdy shoe indicating that the duckling was headed in a new direction) and carried the little duckling home to his wife (the feminine principle accessed fully only when we allow ourselves to be carried along.)

The peasant's children who wanted to play with him made the Ugly Duckling "afraid they might hurt him and he fluttered away." (Though not necessarily malignant, we tend to be afraid of the primal, previously-unknown forces that present themselves and flee from them emo-

tionally lest we be harmed.) The duckling flew into the milk (the substance of creation,) butter (a source of richness and abundance,) and flour (a distillation of earth energy.)

Finally, he darted out of the open door (means of escape from our darkest parts) and "lay exhausted in the new-fallen snow." (Having courage to face his inner genius which is just as frightening as facing the demons, the duckling comes to the neutral place of inner stasis where transformation happens.) He drags himself to the reeds at the edge of the frozen pond (suspended between two worlds where his mind no longer works) and survives the winter.

When Spring came (the time of rebirth, renewal and igniting of the light), the duckling "woke to find the sky bright and the larks (harbingers of new life) singing." He found that his wings were stronger and carried him swiftly away. (He objectified this new found strength not yet realizing that it was a part of him.)

The duckling found himself in a large garden (a place of spiritual growth and healing; renewal of energy and focus) where "apple trees blossomed (death and rebirth, the fruit of the Tree of Life) and sweet-smelling lilacs (rich, perfumed, sensory conveyors of new life and tantalizing possibilities) dangle their long branches over the waters of a lake." (Larger than his former pond, the Ugly Duckling now claims a larger space for himself.)

"Right ahead of him, out of the leafy shadows, came three beautiful white swans." (Emerging from the unconscious into the light of day, the duckling sees his desire embodied.) He felt a strange sadness (mourning and letting go of the hero's journey space) and determined to be with them "even though they will peck me to death because I am so ugly." Though he feared personal harm and rejection (as he was living in his old paradigm), he preferred death to winter's isolation or a return to his former life. (Once there is transformation, there is no turning back.)

When the duckling bowed his head to the water, he saw his reflection (the outward manifestation of the inner transformation that had taken place during the solitary winter). For the first time, he was then able to see himself for who he truly had become. "It did not matter that he was born in a duck's nest. He was hatched from a swan's egg!" This time, he did not go round and round in his head in fruitless mental exercise. Instead, "the three lovely swans circled round and round and stroked him gently with their beaks." (He made the transition from his head to his heart. For this he was rewarded.)

Some little children (reflection of his newly-found ego; he was not afraid of them as he was the peasant's children) came into the garden (the protected space) and threw bits of bread (the foundational nourishment of life). Note that three ingredients that previously he had fled from in fear—milk, butter and flour—now, in the fire of his transfor-

mation, had become bread, something that could sustain him). The outer response (to his inward self acceptance) came from the smallest child. "Look! A new swan! The new one is the prettiest one of all."

The old swans (those who had made a similar journey) bowed their heads in agreement. (Instead of his bowing his head to the old barnyard duck, these elegant creatures were now bowing to him.) "This made the duckling feel quite shy, and he tucked his head under his wing. (Initially, we are not always comfortable with the changes that transformation brings and sometimes "hide out. ")

"His heart filled with joy, and he ruffled his feathers and raised his slender neck, for he had never dreamed of so much happiness when he was an ugly duckling." (Having once been bitten in the neck by the chickens, and receiving the necessary wound that initiated the quest, the duckling now stretches his elegant neck and claims his new swan self-identity. The hero's journey is ended.)

Autobiographical Parallels to Andersen's Life

Andersen fled from his home to escape poverty and social status. Though born in the slums, Andersen always believed himself to be misplaced, an unacknowledged aristocrat, a beautiful swan. He suffered at the hands of the "barnyard animals," those lesser childhood beings who wounded him by their taunts about his appearance and his mannerisms. Though the trappings changed, and he was later adopted by the wealthy Collin family, Andersen was always out to prove to others (and to remind himself) that he really had the right, despite his poor birth circumstances, to "live in the large garden" of his life. He always wanted "the little people" to exclaim at his talent and honor him for his aristocratic spirit.

There is little mention made of Andersen's mother in his many biographical sketches, though his father and grandmother play prominently. In the tale, the mother duckling is resigned to his oddness and gives the duckling a brief chance to fit into the family. But, she quickly aligns with public opinion when family and neighbors turn against the Ugly Duckling. Though not explicitly stated, one wonders how much of this treatment is autobiographical as well. Andersen's family and friends could not have been happy to have been so deliberately left behind. The tale even describes the Ugly Duckling's family as "cruel."

The poultry yard scene is interesting. Clearly, the mother duck sees herself and her family as more distinguished than the chickens, roosters and geese, but not as distinguished as the elder China duck. Andersen shows his bias here for hierarchy the titled, the pedigreed, qualities that he obviously lacks. Zipes notes:

A dominated voice of his narration does not condemn his former social class, rather Andersen loses contact with it by denying the rebellious urges of his class within himself and making compromises that affirmed the rightful domination of the middle class ethic. . . . (Andersen) rarely suggested alternatives or rebellion (in his tales.) Rather, he placed safety before idealism and chose moral compromise over moral outrage, individual comfort and achievement over collective struggle and united goals. He aimed for identification with the power establishment that humiliates subjects rather than opposition to autocracy to put an end to exploitation through power. (83 & 84)

Andersen was not particularly interested in changing the system, but in changing himself to fit into the system. This is further evidenced in the instructions that the mother duck gives before the first barnyard foray when she tells her ducklings that the world is a place of squabbling and snapping. She implies that it is necessary to accept the world the way it is. The goal is not to try to change the world, but to hurry past any frays that are encountered and survive by looking good.

Going out into the world and meeting with other creatures who rejected the Ugly Duckling, who tried to use him, or who offered him help have probable parallels to Andersen's international travels. In seeking out the literati of his time, Andersen seemed to be seeking out "those of his own kind." He did not return to his birth home, but, instead, searched for outward validation of self-worth.

Like the Ugly Duckling, Andersen was slow to see himself as a member of the company of swans. The ending of *The Ugly Duckling* is like Anderson's cry for the world's accreditation. He wants endless confirmation that despite his poor beginnings, he had become a true swan and not just a beautiful swan, but the best of them all.

The story of *The Ugly Duckling* viewed from the perspective of Andersen's life is a tale of one who achieved his dream, but who then spent a lifetime trying to believe it.

Transformation Themes in *The Ugly Duckling*

The number three is frequently repeated in the story. The duckling left the protection of the marsh on the third day. Three dwelled in the small farmhouse (old woman, cat and hen). The duckling flew in a panic into three household ingredients (milk, butter and flour). Some character identification can be made with the Maiden/Mother/Crone, the Triple Goddess archetype, as the reader watches the duckling from hatching to maturity. After the winter, the Ugly Duckling was surrounded by three swans. His transformation occurred in the third season. Three is the number of completion, of perfection, the number of

integrated divinity.

Three also mirrors the death-resurrection cycle found in many religions and traditions. It is also embodied in the three alchemical phases of transformation where the crude *prima material* is transformed into gold. von Franz describes the three-fold alchemical process as progressing through the *negredo*, the Latin word for the blackness of the material when subjected to fire; the *albedo*, the white substance which becomes silver when washed, and the *rubedo* (the red) which through further heating turns into gold.

The *albedo* signifies the individual's first clear awareness of the unconscious... It means the cool, detached attitude, a stage where things look remote and vague, as though seen in the moonlight. In the *albedo*, therefore, it is said that the feminine and the moon are ruling. It also means a receptive attitude towards the unconscious. "Washing off is the ordeal of coming to terms with the shadow; whereas the former stage, the *negredo* marks the first terrible facing of the shadow which is torture, and should be followed by working on and differentiating one's inferior side. The alchemists call this "the hard work." With the progress of the *albedo*, the main stream is relieved. Then simple heating changes the *albedo* into the *rubedo*, which is ruled by the sun and heralds a new state of consciousness. (117)

In *The Ugly Duckling*, the *negredo* is the period during the darkness of the marsh and the subsequent "walkabout" of experience. The *albedo* is the time of frozen white winter, and the *rubedo* is the rush of blood, the emergence of sun in the return of spring, the season of transformation.

Finally, in *A Psychiatric Study of Myths and Fairy Tales*, Julius Heuscher notes:

It is admittedly an oversimplification to reduce the basic challenge to our evolution to three stages: one, progressive feeling of loss of unity with our (spiritual) origins; two, gaining awareness of our identity in the course of contact with the material world; and three, eventual synthesis on a higher plane. (95)

These three stages are congruent with the alchemical motif already described.

Role of the Mother/Stepmother Figure in *The Ugly Duckling*

Jacqueline Schectman, in *The Stepmother in Fairy tales*, makes interesting observations pertinent to the role of the tale duckling.

The stepmother. . . is emblematic of whole family systems gone awry in the face of inevitable growth and change. To know the stepmother. . . is to understand her in the context of relationship and the stages of her family life. (100)

The mother duck is first introduced when she is nesting, waiting for her eggs to hatch. "She had been sitting a long time, or so it seemed to her, and she missed the company of all the other ducks." After the other eggs hatched, she realized that the biggest one of all still remained unhatched. She complains that she is "so tired of waiting," but settles to do just that. The mother duckling seems content in her nesting until an elder duck raises doubts about the real nature of the large egg. The mother duck's response is, "But I've already waited so long. I may as well wait a little longer," reflecting the mother duck's concern about her time investment, but not necessarily about her duckling.

When the first ducklings hatch, she quacks at them for maternal identification, and they respond with the predictable peeps. However, when the Ugly Duckling finally hatches, she "just looked at him" wondering about his true identity. Her first thought is, "Into the water he'll go, even if have to push him in myself." From the very beginning, the mother duckling was worried about how the Ugly Duckling would reflect on her.

During the first swim, when she saw how well the Ugly Duckling "uses his legs and how straight he holds himself," she concluded that "he is my own child after all, and really not so ugly when you look at him properly." Though not indicative of unconditional love, the mother duck evidences at least some maternal acceptance.

Before the ducklings enter the barnyard, the mother duck explains how to look good and behave correctly so that they are considered to be a fine, well-bred family, and she, then, is deemed to be a good mother. Soon after they enter, the Ugly Duckling is attacked by the chickens. The mother duck cries, "Leave him alone! He's doing no harm." She even defends him to the old China duck, "He is good tempered and he swims as well as the others. And I am sure he will turn out all right."

Andersen states ominously, "But that was only the first day." Afterwards, the Ugly Duckling's troubles grew until even his own brothers and sisters chased him and made fun of him. At this point, "the mother duck looked at him sadly and wished he were far away."

That is the last the reader hears of the mother duck as she is not mentioned after the Ugly Duckling runs away. One can only hope in

Schectman's words that

. . . in becoming who they truly are, her (stepmother's) children bring a necessary healing to the home. (101)

In *The Drama of the Gifted Child: The Search for the True Self*, Alice Miller explores in detail the mother-child dynamic. In treating children, she states:

If we start from the premise that a person's whole development (and his balance, which is based on it) is dependent on the way *his mother* experienced his *expression of needs and sensations* during his first days and weeks of life, then we must assume that it is here that the *beginning of a later tragedy* might be set. If a mother cannot take pleasure in her child as he is but must have him behave in a particular way, then the first value selection takes place for the child. Now "good" is differentiated from "bad," "nice" from nasty," and "right" from "wrong." Against this background will follow all his further valuations of himself. (Italics are Alice Miller's) (85)

Given that *The Ugly Duckling* is a semi-autobiographical tale and so few facts are available about his mother, the conclusions are obvious. That is why the Ugly Duckling's flight from the barnyard and subsequent solitary winter were so critical. As Miller states,

His plight is no doubt the result of social pressures, but these do not have their effect on his psyche through abstract knowledge; they are firmly anchored in his earliest affective experience with his mother. Thus his problems cannot be solved with *words*, but only through *experience-not* merely corrective experiences as an adult but, above all, through a conscious experience of his early fear of his beloved mother's contempt and his subsequent feelings of indignation and sadness. (104)

Mothers who derive their own value and self-worth by vicariously living their children's lives can create real tragedies. These women, having never received nurturance from their own mothers, create another generation of emotionally-truncated individuals, another tragic reenactment of lack and isolation.

Until the gifted child, the true swan, takes the first step out of the barnyard and into the marsh to begin the hero's journey of transformation, nothing changes for the individual or for the mother. Miller notes,

In order to become whole we must try, in a long process, to discover our own personal truth, a truth that may cause pain before giving us a new sphere of freedom. We choose instead to content ourselves with intellectual "wisdom," we will remain in the sphere of illusion and self-deception. (I)

Conclusion

The Ugly Duckling is a tale for all persons, a tale for those who wish to dive deeply into the realm of the unconscious. It is a story of transformation, of liberation, of rebirth. Written by a man caught between two worlds, two times, it reveals valuable insights for this time, this history.

Life is the hero's journey. It's time to stop blaming our mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, life in general. Transformation is a choice.

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