

Snow White Retold

Fairy tales are Goddess stories.

Like folk songs, dances, customs, embroidery and paint patterns, this is where Goddess wisdom was hidden in the time of the Great Forgetting. In particular when a fairy tale contains the colours 'White, Red, Black, as well as significant magical numbers (3, 7, 9, 13); these are strong markers indicating Goddess Lore hidden in plain view for those with the eyes to see and the ability to tell story in such a way that this wisdom becomes clear once more. Often the stories contain information of the time of the change, when patriarchy had come in, when power over ways of behaviour were becoming established and the wisdom tales show both the distortion, the ancient initiation gateways and the ways of reclaiming healthy womanhood and manhood through the journey of those initiations back to source that the distortion would hold us away from.

I like to retell these wisdom keeper tales, untwisting the distortions and finding the initiation guidance these ancient stories hold for us, to re-find our way into living harmoniously together and reclaiming the healthy mature archetypes of the Wheel of life as men and women.

I strongly believe that part of the enduring allure of and long lived fascination with fairy tales is precisely because we collectively feel the ways of initiation hidden within them and hunger for this wisdom.

Snow White is perhaps the best known fairy tale in which the colours Red, White and Black are significant right from the beginning of the story, so let us examine the archetypal layers and initiation journey wisdom revealed within this classic fairy tale. For me this is a wisdom story containing the memory of the ways of the Goddess of Love.

Snow White's name itself: 'White like Snow' hints at the reference to Aphrodite from the time of our Dark Ages. Aphrodite, whose colour was White, Her temples were often replaced by chapels or churches to 'Maria of snow', or 'our white lady' in Southern Europe. White as colour of the Maiden aspect of Goddess also stands for innocence in the true meaning of the word: 'completely present in the now', and indicates the presence of Goddess in each moment or situation if we can bring our own presence to be with Her.

As the story starts, we find a 'queen' (symbolising: a priestess or a woman of the old ways) praying to Goddess and scrying the signs in nature for the birth of a daughter, her first born, that this daughter may be marked as one of the Goddess. Marked for and protected by the three faces of Goddess: Maiden (white), Lover/Mother (Red) and Crone (Black). After the celebrated birth of this first born girl, which tells us of the lineage through the matrilineal inheritance which predates the father to son ways of patriarchy, the mother dies, symbolising the loss of Goddess ways, of the old world. The girl is left with an adoring father 'king' (read: man of the Goddess/ of the old ways).

The king now re-marries (for to have sovereignty the embodied Goddess in the form of Her priestess needs to be the link for and with the King to the land). This time the queen is a woman of the distortion and she rules in Power Over abusive ways. She still has one of the symbolic objects of the

Goddess of Love, a magic mirror with which to see beauty, but she uses it only to enhance her own status and position, and to play out her jealousy, her woman-to-woman wounding behaviour rooted in patriarchy.

As Snow White grows up, seemingly unaware, in a walking sleep of avoidance to what is going on around her, she continues embodying innocence and the healthy young feminine, a true part of the ways of Goddess, through her love and her connectedness to nature, and her loving, kind heart.

At this time, her father the King dies, killed by the new queen. Whether through her 'poison' or by her direct lack of love for him, either way by her disconnection from source which is his own true connection to sovereignty. This shows us the destructive ways of killing the love: the form and true power of the heart of the masculine and of the Goddess loving men of the old ways, by the power-over behaviour patterns of the unhealthy feminine.

Now the magic mirror of the Goddess of Love starts to show those who care to look, that the real beauty of the land, of the feminine and of sovereignty is to be found in Snow White, and no longer in the Dark Queen. Envy, hatred and jalousie rule this queen as markers of her own fear of the loss of her power as she no longer has access to the source within that is the mark of true empowerment.

At this part of the story the symbolism of the distortion become very strong, as the dark queen in her destroyer aspect, seeks to kill the young feminine of the Goddess ways, who is the rightful 'queen' of the land and through her mother's lineage, keeper of the ways of Goddess. The dark queen seeks to destroy the feminine she sees as competition, and for this purpose she seeks to corrupt the free masculine she wishes to control. This takes the form in the story, of the hunter; wild man of nature and the old ways of honouring life and death. She orders the hunter to seduce Snow White, take her to the woods and kill her, and she requires him to bring her the heart of the girl as proof of his submission to her murderous ways. The heart of course the symbol both for love and life itself, in this act she is asking the wild masculine to betray his own heart and life source, by behaving against the laws of nature, against the ways of Goddess.

The trapped wild masculine under control of the power-over behaviour of the distorted feminine is cut off from his own freedom and becomes destructive. At first it looks like the hunter will abandon his own soul path and obey the distorted dark queen's ways of destruction. However, by spending just a little time in the presence of the radiance (beauty and innocence) of Snow White, he is re-connected to his heart and honour. Remembering his devotion to Goddess and to the ways of love, as well as to his true soul path in service to life.

Instead of killing her, he speaks truth and warns Snow White of the plans and intentions of the Dark Queen. Instead of the girl, and with due ceremony, the hunter kills a doe, deer being the animal most associated with Diana, Goddess of the hunt and the totem animal of grace and innocence, the heart of which he brings to the dark queen. In this way he is able to hide Snow White's freedom and protect the safety of the life of the Maiden, symbolising the living ways of Goddess.

Snow White herself experiences the first awakening of sexual desire and 'falling in love' with the masculine, the awakening of her true nature as Goddess of Love, with the hunter. It is however in the realisation that he was not there with her out of love but from a place of meaning to do her

harm, 'to kill her', that she is shaken into awakening out of unconsciousness about the toxicity of her situation (her sexual awakening opens her eyes to what is real).

In shock, as she is finally forced to see things as they really are through the clear voice of the wild masculine, she sees the danger in the distortion of unhealthy power over ways, far removed from the ways of Goddess, that she has lived under and hidden in, for so long. Snow White now has no other option then to choose to leave the house of poison of the Dark Queen; the castle of patriarchy, and go into the wild, into the woods where the old ways live; to free herself, to be herself.

As she journeys deeper into the wild woods at first she is afraid, and unsure of how to be in this 'alien' environment, but soon she starts to remember her innate nature as part of the wild, and the frightening surroundings become beautiful, filled with meaning and magic. Before long she finds she can communicate with the animals, re-claiming the magical aspect of the Wild Maiden archetype within herself that like a Shamanka can shift between realities.

Later she finds her way into the realms of the elemental beings as if almost by accident (she falls asleep in a little empty house and is woken up by dwarfs, finding herself in their dwelling). Jung believed the 7 dwarfs to represent all common men, stuck in an immature (small) work oriented plane of existence. I find that the meaning of the fairy tale as Goddess lore works better when we look at the dwarfs as masculine elemental earth beings, finding treasure deep within the secret places, delving magic and offering their protection to the Maiden as she begins to find herself and define her role and realm. This Goddess Lore interpretation also echoes and links in with the dwarfs and their important role as the challengers who test and gift, as the magic treasure creators as well as the representation of the sexually wounded masculine, as told in the story of the Lover Goddess of the Northern lands: Freya and Her magic belt, which is a mythology for another time.

At first, it is through the initiation of being able to perform mature responsible tasks that serve the greater good of the community (the realm) that Snow White starts to change. In the story this is represented by cooking, cleaning and being able to run a home. Furthermore, there is the initiation into acting as Goddess of Love that she finally has a chance to practise in a healthy way, represented as caring for the elemental masculine in his most Earthy form as well as with the animals of the wild places. Lastly, through slowly realising that all is not well or as it should be for her, she is initiated through a disquiet, even a sense of danger, to be lured into settling for this comfortable life that would keep her away from her destiny. For this initiation, she needs to fully integrate her own masculine, the masculine in a form that could meet her as equal and magical; in other words, she needs to step up into claiming her realm as Goddess of Love and healthy mature feminine.

To make this danger of compromise and avoidance of facing what she must initiate into obvious, we find the Dark Queen realising with the help of her magic mirror that Snow White is indeed not dead, but instead has found refuge in the realm of the elemental Earth masculine.

The destroyer queen disguises herself three times to bring gifts in the form of the symbols of the Goddess of Love that are now poisonous through her distortion, to Snow White, to try to kill her. Not being able any longer to enter the world (house) of the elemental 'other world' where the girl resides, the queen has to tempt and trick Snow White to open the door or window, something which the dwarfs advise her against as they leave to do their work, but which the girl ignores.

Normally in fairy tales, the old woman Crone, the witch, is the archetype that challenges and tests the young feminine to transform and step into and through her initiation, to claim and become the empowered mature feminine and claim her rightful place, her realm, her love, her inheritance and identity. In the story of Snow White, as the dark queen shape shifts into the witch, we find the echo of this role of archetypal feminine challenger as well.

She brings Snow White three magical, and by her hand poisonous, Goddess of Love symbols: the belt, the comb and an apple.

The belt is the circle of life, death and rebirth, and is the marker of the irresistible beauty of life as worn by the Goddess of Love. The comb is the detangler of that which is yours and that which belongs to others, that is projection, and helps you to find your truth, form, and path as offered by the Goddess of Love. The apple (like the Hazel nut) is the fruit of wisdom of the Goddess of Love, especially sacred to Aphrodite and Venus, containing the magical pentacle in its hidden centre, holding the seeds of life, future and love.

As Snow White fails to see through the disguise of the dark queen she succumbs to the poisonous spell of patriarchy, and can't fully initiate yet into healthy femininity nor claim her realm. She is rescued from the death-like sleep the poison induces (unconscious behaviour and forgetting of the meaning of the symbols of the Goddess: the Great Forgetting) only by the timely arrival of her allays: the loving elemental masculine who, being of the Earth, are not fooled by the distortion.

The third time the deception is particularly powerful as the dark queen, the distortion of the power over behaviour in the feminine form, poisons one half of the apple, fruit of the Goddess, and demonstrates the 'safety' of eating from this fruit by taking a bite out of the none toxic side of the apple to re-assure Snow White. Of course, the poison of patriarchy is toxic to all, even to one already within this system, so it is significant in the story that one half of the apple is not poisoned and remains safe to eat.

As Snow White is tempted through her longing for sisterhood and for belonging to the world of adult women and men, to take a bite of the apple offered, she finds that she can't swallow the poison of patriarchy. Instead the piece of toxicity sticks in her throat. The message here is simple and powerful: power over behaviour is poisons and contra life, it sticks in the throat of the living embodiment of Goddess and is incompatible to healthy maturity.

Snow White now falls into a death like sleep in which she does not decay but remains magically alive looking; the perfect metaphor for the ways of Goddess hidden in plain view.

The Dwarfs mourn her and create for her a clear quartz crystal coffin. Rather than burying her in the Earth, they set her atop a hill and keep watch over her. This mystical substance, clear quartz: 'the Jade of Europe', is used most commonly to predict the future. The word quartz itself comes from the mid European languages 'twarc' or 'tvrđ' meaning 'hard' and is said in crystal lore to be particularly good for personal growth. As if in a chrysalis, the transformational death of the old and journey into the becoming of the new is guarded and kept safe for the young feminine on her initiation journey into the future.

One day the setting sun (time of the rising of Venus as Evening star) strikes the crystal case and attracts the attention of the 'prince' the healthy masculine on his initiation journey, as he rides into

the story. Drawn by the shining of the light, the prince arrives at the site of the crystal chrysalis and sees a woman of such beauty his heart opens fully for her in adoration. He asks the dwarfs to open the coffin for him, and after some persuasion, they comply, recognising his strong loving intent.

In their effort to move the lid, they jolt the crystal coffin (or drop it), which shakes Snow White awake and causes the piece of apple to dislodge out of her throat (an Earthquake, seismic shift of perception, awakens her). The transformation complete, the chrysalis opens and the new form of life is revealed as the Maiden /Princess becomes the Love Goddess and opens her eyes, instantly recognising the loving healthy masculine who is her match. It a fact, her radiance has called home to her, though the veils of unconscious separation, her inner masculine, reflected in the presence of the prince at her awakening.

As they see each other, Love blossoms between the woman and man. Their kiss, symbol of love as the creating life force and the meeting of feminine and masculine in all its forms, is exchanged to mark the completion of the transformation and initiation into the next stage of maturity both have reached in the finding of themselves and each other.

The Lover Goddess and Her Beloved now take ownership of the realm and the dark queen is banished without a fight, as just the sight and power of Love makes her recoil and withdraw and the ways of Love and Goddess wisdom are refound and restored.

In some telling of the tale, the final punishment for the dark queen is to be put into red hot metal shoes, in which she must dance until she dies. This gruesome end echoes the severity of punishment of the Dark Ages and the times in which this story originates. It takes on another layer of meaning if seen from the point of view that in fairy tales, shoes usually symbolise the yoni, sacred source of feminine sexuality and the Goddess of Love.

As this ancient story guides us to examine our own journeys of initiation into healthy mature relating and being as women and men, it is important to remember that all the archetypes are within us at all time.

We all have a dark queen, lost maiden, loving woman and great queen. We all have aspects that are the trapped powerless king, wild free hunter, loyal earth man, seeking prince and Royal Beloved. Most importantly, we need to own and embrace all these aspects in our self to be able to be who we truly are.

If we remember this we can shine the ways of the Goddess of Love, who also is found within us all, out in the world through our lived actions of compassion, love and support. May this be the initiation and medicine of our time.

By Katinka Soetens