THE EFFECTS OF LIGHT ON HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS
AS EXEMPLIFIED IN JOHANN WOLFGANG VON
GOETHE'S FAIRY TALE

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In memoriam William F. Scherer.
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Introduction

The topic of this thesis is the analysis of the effects of light on human consciousness as exemplified in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s *Fairy Tale*.

Among the most interesting phenomena in Goethe’s mysterious tale is the appearance of light. Light appears as a transformational force that affects all characters and leads to positive changes throughout the tale. The crucial function of light, concerning the ongoing events in the episodic narration, will be analyzed. The entire structure of the *Fairy Tale* reveals an ongoing process of metamorphosis. During this process human beings transcend from one state of consciousness into another state through direct or indirect contact with light.

Most direct, or visible, changes appear primarily on the physical level, and secondarily on the emotional level. Stray-lights initiate the dangerous journey of the ferryman in the beginning. The light of the old man’s lamp shows him the way into hidden places throughout the tale. In the end the giant shadow transforms into a sunclock that measures time. There are altogether 181 occurrences of light in the tale. These occurrences can be divided into different categories of light appearances. The goal of this thesis is the explanation of all light occurrences. The author opens six different categories of light appearances according to their frequencies in the text. The literary interpretation is based on these categories. It will be shown that positive transformation through light gradually affects the consciousness of all dramatis personae. They all suffer misery in the beginning and enjoy common happiness in the end. Yet first they have to overcome difficult obstacles. They would not survive these critical situations without the
helpful influence of light. The greatest difficulty is the unfortunate love between the young Prince and Lily. This love leads to the death of the Prince. The mental powers that are represented by the magic light of the old man’s lamp and the serpent save the Prince’s life and bring about the final happy end. However, beyond this colorful narration Goethe expresses his conception of science. Through contemplation and observations of nature Goethe came to his conclusions. Whereas other scientists of his time, such as Newton, experimented, he simply experienced nature. Newton expressed his innovative ideas in his theory of light.

Goethe’s polemic reaction to Newton’s findings reflected a critical attitude towards Newton’s scientific methods. The Fairy Tale differs not at all from Faust Part II in the sense that knowledge is represented as heightened consciousness deriving from individual transformation. Both works demonstrate that human suffering derives from a lack of knowledge and that striving for knowledge is crowned by success. The key questions in the Fairy Tale are the same that motivate Faust’s studies. Human cognition and perception are shaped by scientific findings. These findings engender revolution in thought throughout the centuries. Today, the greatest scientific innovations are expected from quantum technology. Through the discussion of light, the author will give an outlook on modern research in physics that connects with Goethe’s way of science. New findings in physics allow a phenomenological interpretation of an important aspect in the Fairy Tale, the appearance and function of light.

Goethe produced a sizeable body of scientific work. He studied such diverse topics as plants, color, clouds, weather, morphology, and geology. We know that he believed that these studies, rather than his literary work, would some day be recognized
as his greatest contribution to humankind. Today, in “light” of modern physics, we may
indeed consider that it is the Tao of Physics that flows through Goethe’s narration. This
fascinating title refers to Fritjof Capra’s best selling book that was internationally
published in 1991. Capra, the author of The Turning Point and Uncommon Wisdom,
explores the striking parallels between modern physics and eastern mysticism. He offers
an integration of the mathematical world-view of modern physics and the mystical
visions of Buddha and Krishna. The high-energy theorist successfully unites these
seemingly different world-views. To this extent, he steps into Goethe’s path. In its time,
Goethe’s science was highly unusual because it moved away from a quantitative,
materialistic approach to things in nature. Goethe emphasized, instead, an intimate,
firsthand encounter between student and thing studied. Direct experiential contact
became the basis for scientific generalization and understanding.

Most of Goethe’s works, including the Fairy Tale, were seen as subjective artistic
descriptions. He was criticized as a scientific dilettante or as a philosophical idealist who
imposed intellectual constructs on things on nature. Only in the twentieth century, with
the philosophical articulation of phenomenology, do we have a conceptual language able
to describe Goethe’s way of science accurately.
Chapter One:

1. Historical Background of the *Fairy Tale*

In 1794, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe expressed his thoughts concerning the connection of the human soul with the world of the senses, and the supersensory, in a fantasy entitled *The Fairy Tale of the Green Snake and the Beautiful Lily.* The images comprising the *Fairy Tale* began to emerge in Goethe’s creative consciousness during a journey that he made from his home in Weimar to Karlsbad accompanied by his friend Friedrich Schiller in late June, 1795. While Schiller approached the question of human existence in a philosophical way, Goethe’s *Fairy Tale* is an allegory of transformation that is based on the symbolism of alchemy. The ideas or concepts they discussed concerned human morality, from which man draws his impulses—from morals which raise man above all. Goethe wanted to express his thoughts in the form of a picture. This was the story of the green snake and the Lily.

In order to understand the complicated symbolic structure of the *Fairy Tale*, the whole concept has to be taken into consideration. The protagonists are not individual human beings, but parts of an utopia. Interestingly, Goethe kept silent about a wealth of details. These unexplained details can be understood when carefully viewed as elements of the entire structure. Yet, these protagonists are not characterized by any standards at all. They are not uniform, but complex, and their actions create puzzles of action which are confusing. Katharina Mommsen points out that the reader who becomes lost in the fascination of single characters would overlook the main idea of the narration:

> Even the title of the tale can only be understood if one recognizes the hint of an utopian content. It is not possible to change the world fundamentally. Anybody who is blind to this truth and hangs on to illusions is concerned with the impossible. Ideal improvement of this world is - *Fairy Tale*.1

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1 Katharina Mommsen, 201
Scholars today believe that they need to possess background knowledge in the alchemical symbolism, which was the starting point for Goethe’s allegory, in order to decode the Fairy Tale. For this reason, it is understandable that various commentaries have only touched upon some facets of the work. Goethe intended to remain mysterious with his tale. On August 21, 1795, the initial manuscript of the Fairy Tale was submitted to Schiller for Die Horen. Goethe added the following note: “My contribution this time is more of a bound than a smooth transition from a tale of domestic life to a tale of wonder. Receive it kindly.” (Raphael 77) Soon afterwards, on September 23, 1795, Goethe told Schiller that the manuscript of the Fairy Tale had been completed. In this collection, although it appears to be completely different from the other stories, it was later included in Goethe’s Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten (Conversations of German Refugees). Goethe’s refugees are German aristocrats fleeing the French Revolution from their estates on the west bank of the Rhine. Arriving at another property they own across the river, they come into friction with one another. They are teasing and aggravating themselves since in exile from their native land. They have lost their material possessions, and as a result they become homeless wanderers. It seems they are unable to settle in a new home and at the same time unable to return to the old one. Goethe’s group represents the range of these political possibilities open to the German upper class at that time. Along with this goes the good manners of the baroness and the Abbé’s patience at the immaturity of Carl and Louisa. The group constitutes a microcosm of society, the revolution within the group. In this context, Jane K. Brown points out that:

They shut out this social threat not only with the walls of their estate, but also with the baroness’ stricture against political discussion when all are present and with the Abbe’s decision to tell them stories. The effectiveness of these ‘walls’ is periodically tested by small catastrophes analogous to the large one raging across the river—the sound of a shot from within the house (a desk cracking, as it turns out), the fire on their aunt’s estate nearby, Carl’s insistence on the anarchic autonomy of the imagination. Although the cycle is open-ended and does not return its figures to their original society, the increasing civility of their
discussions, the increasing sophistication of the stories told by the Abbé and of their responses to them, and especially the improved responses of Louisa offer some measure of their spiritual fortification.2

The *Fairy Tale* is an allegory representing a process that describes other processes distinct from itself. All processes are depicted in the frame of a cycle. During this cycle it is not possible to unlock its symbols because there is no consistency to a particular figure throughout the tale. Yet, it is possible to see an allegory of restoration of society. This restoration is based on the same mechanisms that work in the frame of the *Conversations*. The frame of the *Conversations* depicts the German response to the French Revolution on a microcosmic level.

Jane K. Brown interprets certain symbols in the *Fairy Tale* as representation of society's disorder. She refers to a society that separates the two halves of its world. She defines these symbols as the rushing river at the beginning, the four buried kings, and the enchantment that causes the princess to kill everything she touches. The misery ends through the irrepressible sociability of the two visiting will-o-the-wisps, and through the snake's decision to sacrifice her identity as a snake in order to become a reconciling bridge. In the end the princess is united with her prince, the river is spanned by a bridge, and the temple with its kings has risen to the daylight. Brown sees a parallel to the good manners and renunciation demanded by the baroness in the *Conversations* whereas the old man with the lamp appears as a sly self-portrait of the Abbé and his transforming stories. He is the one who knows exactly what needs to be done, but he depends on the cooperation of all the others. There is something inadequate about cultivating good manners as a response to the terrors of the revolution. Indeed, it seems to be a trivial

2 Jane K. Brown/ Jan v. Heurck, 4
response. Yet, the allegoric tale summarizes all concerns and raises them to a higher level. There is no doubt that Goethe knew his work would be of interest in the distant future. While composing the tale, he wrote to Schiller, “I would like to end the Conversations of German Emigrants with the Fairy Tale, and I want to immortalize this work.” Friedrich Schiller responded on August 29, 1795, “The Fairy Tale is colorful and funny enough, and I think the idea that you have mentioned before: ‘the mutual collaboration of manifold forces’ (das gegenseitige Hülfeleisten der Kräfte) is realized quite well.” 3

Goethe was thankful for his friendship with Schiller, because he was isolated in Weimar after his return from Italy. The rejuvenation of his own art, which Goethe had in mind in Rome, was not thinkable without the support of friends. Yet, even Schiller believed his own poetical productivity to be dead for many years and turned to philosophical work. Goethe used all his influence to take his friend away from Kant’s philosophy and back to poetry. He strongly believed in Schiller’s poetic creativity, instead of theorizing about art. This is the reason why Goethe gave all main characters in the Fairy Tale creative abilities. An epigram of the Zyklus der Xenien, which was composed by both friends, explains the tale as being an utopia of rejuvenation of humanity through improvement of such characters: “More than twenty persons are busy in the Fairy Tale. So what are they all doing? They make the Fairy Tale, my friend.”4

Schiller, in his Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man, expressed his thoughts concerning the state of the powers of the human soul that is required for an existence truly worthy of man. Schiller wished to found a harmonious common life in human

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3 Both cited in Katharina Mommsen, 182-183
4 Katharina Mommsen, 202
society by developing free personalities. Free personality would be a person who reveals in her or his sensuality the spiritual quality of reason, as well as the power of passion in reasoning. These letters were originally written for the Duke of Augustenburg. In 1794, they were published in the already mentioned annual, *Die Horen*. In Goethe’s correspondence with Schiller, these thoughts were discussed in a lively way. Especially, the problem of the form that the human community should take, and it was the French Revolution that helped raise these questions. The revolution had not entirely kept its promises of freedom and equality, as it became apparent that the change of economic conditions could not necessarily cause a renewal of humanity. Thus, another assumption had to gain reality, which was the improvement or refinement of individual character.

Schiller pointed out that such a process of improvement could only be initiated through art. On October 26, 1794, Goethe replied, deeply satisfied by Schiller’s *Aesthetic Letters*:

> The manuscript sent to me I read at once with great pleasure, I drained it in a single drought. Just as a precious drink, which suits our nature slips down willingly and shows its health-bringing effect already upon the tongue, putting our nervous system into a good mood, these letters were pleasing and beneficial to me. How could it be otherwise, when I found described so consistently and so nobly what I have come to recognize for a long time as right, and what I have in part lived and part wished to live.  

Schiller wanted to surround all contemporaries with symbols of excellence until illusion overcomes and conquers reality. This principle is realized in Goethe’s *Fairy Tale*. The constitution of a government within an area of beauty, the end of all egotism, the equality of everybody in a perfectly happy community can be experienced in this tale. Yet, in the beginning, all individual characters suffer and are afflicted with misfortune. The reason for their sufferings lies in fabulous misery, which affects them differently. A

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1 Goethe cited in Katharina Mommsen, 208
puzzle of picture-like scenes is deriving from there which as a matter of structure enables us to solve the puzzle.

There is the beautiful Lily who suffers misery because her touch kills all her loved ones. There is a sad young prince who will become her victim, an old woman who fears the loss of her right hand, a giant who can only do things by using his shadow, four kings in the underground temple who are tied in their chairs, and a ferryman who has trouble negotiating the river and remains a poor man. Even the dangerous river has to be mentioned, because Goethe included it in the Dramatis Personae. The action in the *Fairy Tale* leads us to the point where all sufferings end through good luck. The participation in this good fortune reunites all the unhappy characters. The old man with the little lamp announces that a common happiness will heal everybody's pain, "One person cannot help, but will if he forms an alliance with many others at the right moment. (Ein Einzelner hilft nicht, sondern wer sich mit vielen zur rechten Zeit verbündet.)"

The figures and actions allow us continually to think of symbolic meanings, and every detail seems to be hinting at an underlying problem. Goethe took the whole structure very seriously. He created it with a loving soul (*liebender Seele*). He associates social improvement with renunciation of ego. Brown states clearly:

In the *Conversations* what must be renounced is, in effect, excessive preoccupation with oneself and one’s own concerns—Louisa must stop talking about her absent fiancé; Carl’s understanding of liberty as the right to say and do whatever one pleases is the antithesis of this concept. Renunciation is the basis of the good manners that restore order to the baroness’ circle.6

Furthermore, the stories of the Abbé focus greatly on representations of successful renunciation. He appears to be the educator of the small society like the snake or the old man with the little lamp in the *Fairy Tale*. Both play a role that Goethe and Schiller

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6 J.K.Brown/Jan v. Heurck, 4-5
envisioned in the ambitious program of *Die Horen*. Literature and art, the guarantors and generators of society, were to lead the nation to new levels of civilization and culture.

The great popularity of Goethe’s *Conversations* in the later eighteenth century derived, perhaps, from the ideal of a human society that finds its foundation in the cooperation and goodwill of educated individuals. These individuals are civilized by the efforts of philosopher-poets. Individual subjectivity that Goethe himself had criticized so cogently in *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, signified, at the end of his life, the irreducible core of human existence. Goethe through the French Revolution experienced a personal revelation. Later it was translated as “the mystery revealed” (“das offenbare Geheimnis”).

*It was revealed to him “…that life as we have to live it is not within our control but is dealt out to us by an unaccountable power. ‘We are rarely moved of ourselves to renounce this or that wish’, remarks the Baroness’ daughter, ‘usually it is external circumstances that force us to do so.”*7 Consequently, we read in the *Fairy Tale*: “How many secrets do you know?”—“Three,” replied the old man. “Which is the most important?” asked the silver king. “The open one,” replied the old man. Boyle points out that there are many such poker-faced exchanges of weighty obscurity in the story that seems to be totally different from all those that have preceded them:

One senses that he had set a trap for Schiller, who, however, was careful never to take the bait. Perhaps, though—and in relation to this text everything, frankly, is speculation—even this ‘game of hide and seek’ with the public was in accordance with the deep and serious purpose of the *Conversations*, itself very successfully concealed. ‘Philosophy,’ Mme de Staël remarked, ‘must be the invisible power that directs the operations [of the poetic imagination] but if it were to show itself too soon it would destroy the enchantment.’8

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7 Nicolas Boyle, Vol.2, 327
8 Nicolas Boyle, Vol.2, 327
2. Summary of the Fairy Tale

Two will-o'-the-wisps awake an old ferryman during a dark night. They ask him to take them across the dangerous river. Afterwards, they attempt to pay him with gold, which he rejects, since he is afraid of the river’s fury. Instead, the ferryman asks to be paid with fruits of the earth, which the will-o’-the-wisps hate, and as a result he remains unpaid. In his desperation, he throws the gold, which they have placed in his boat, down the rocks. There lies the green snake, who awakes from the falling gold. She devours the glittering coins and then starts to glow and to grow. Thus, a prophecy made long ago, becomes true. She doubts that her new beauty will last, and starts slithering along, through roots and bushes. At a certain point, she meets the already mentioned will-o’-the-wisps, who call her “Lady Cousin,” and feed her with more gold. The will-o’-the-wisps are surprised to hear that the goal of their journey, the beautiful Lily, is where they had just come from, on the other side of the river. However, the ferryman transports people to only one side of the river. Fortunately, the snake knows about a giant, whose shadow will carry them across the water again. The will-o’-the-wisps take off, and the snake continues wandering until she finds a temple.

In this temple, four kings are tied to their chairs. They ask her to solve a riddle. An old man with a little lamp also appears in the temple. He knows three secrets, of which the so-called “open one” is the most important, but it can only be revealed in case someone knows the fourth. The green snake does. She hisses something into his ears, the man sinks away to the Westward side, and the snake to the Eastward.

When the old man reenters his little cottage, he finds his wife in extreme distress. She was visited by the will-o’-the-wisps. They embarrassed her with their compliments, and licked away all the film of gold in the house. This golden film had covered the walls. A little dog ‘Mops’ had eaten one of the gold pieces as well. It died immediately. The old man’s wife also knows that the will-o’-the-wisps owe the ferryman three cabbages, three
artichokes and three onions. She decides to take the will-o’-the-wisps to the river, when it is day. The old man with the little lamp transforms the dead Mops into the prettiest onyx, puts it into a basket containing the required cabbages, artichokes, and onions, and sends his wife to the river. Thus, the ferryman would be paid, and the green snake would take her across the water to the fair Lily, who could, by her touch, bring the stony Mops back to life.

On her way, she almost steps upon the giant’s shadow, who steals her basket and one of each fruit. Instead of somehow refilling her basket, she continues walking and reaches the river, where a noble young prince walks desperately up and down the riverside. The ferryman gets very angry about the lost fruits, and forces her to put her hand into the stream. She has to promise to pay her debts within twenty-four hours. When taking out her hand again she finds it black as a coal, and slowly vanishing.

The young prince is eager to see Lily. The snake, who forms a swelling bridge, takes them across the river. On the other side, they become aware of the will-o’-the-wisps, who have made their way there as well. The beautiful Lily is sadly weeping in the park, where her little canary, scared of a hawk, has died after flying against her chest. The old woman approaches the Lily, begging her for new fruit, and hands the onyx Mops to her. The Lily is pleased by the present, but cannot help with any new artichokes, since they do not grow in her garden.

While playing with the little Mops, she weeps for the temple and the bridge over the river, which were promised to her by prophecy. The snake tells her that the prophecy of the bridge is fulfilled, and that she has heard the old man in the temple announcing another sign by saying: “The time is at hand.” Soon afterwards, the young prince, with the hawk on his hand, approaches Lily. When he sees her playing with Mops, he runs into her arms, wanting to be touched. He immediately dies. In order to save him from putrefaction, the snake forms a magic circle around him with her own body. The old man with the little lamp appears and places the little dead canary bird in this circle. The snake
decides to sacrifice herself rather than be sacrificed, if the old man promises her that no part of her body, turning into stones, will remain on the shore.

The beautiful Lily is told by the old man to touch the snake with her left hand and the prince's body with the right one. The touch of the beautiful Lily awakens him back to life. The snake turns into a bright ring of luminous jewels. The old man gathers them all into the basket and throws the load into the river.

Afterwards, the old man with the little lamp asks the two will-o'-the-wisps to unlock the door of the sanctuary, which he is going to show them. Everybody follows the old man, and the procession, including the prince, the Lily, the old man and the old woman, and the two will-o'-the-wisps halt in front of a large brazen door, which is closed by a golden lock. The will-o'-the-wisps eat the lock, and the door suddenly springs open. The stately figures of the four kings appear within the sanctuary. A conversation begins. The four kings ask the old man who will govern the world. The old man answers that the one who would stand on his feet will govern, but probably none of them. The ground begins to move beneath them.

The entire temple moves like a ship that softly glides away from the harbor. The temple drops beneath the river and ascends again from the ground where the little cottage of the ferryman stood. Planks and beams crash at the opening of the dome. While the women scream aloud, the temple shakes like a ship running aground. The cottage has been converted from the inside out into solid silver. A fair little temple appears in the middle of the large one, taking form of an altar. By a staircase which ascends from within stands the noble young prince, lighted by the old man with his lamp. The former owner of the cottage, the ferryman, appears in a short white robe with a silver rudder in his hand. The old woman bathes her black, vanishing hand in the river, since all debts are paid. First her hand, then the entire woman, becomes rejuvenated.

At that moment, the rising sun appears upon the rim of the dome. The old man steps between the virgin Lily and the young prince. In a loud voice he shouts that there
are three who will rule the earth: wisdom, appearance and strength. At the first word, the golden king rises; at the second, the silver one; and at the third, the brazen king slowly rises while the mixed king all of a sudden very awkwardly plops down. Whoever cannot laugh about his shapeless sinking is obliged to turn away his eyes. The prince receives the sword of the brazen king, the scepter of the silver one, and the oaken garland of the golden king, who tells him, “Understand what is highest!”

Then the prince starts to speak. His first word is, “Lily!” When they embrace each other for the first time, the old man says, “Love does rule; but it educates, and that is more.” With all this happiness and rapture, no one observes that it is now broad daylight. A large space surrounded by pillars forms the court, at the end of which a broad and stately bridge is visible, stretching with many arches across the river. It is adorned, on both sides, with colonnades for travelers on foot. Many thousands are already there. There are horsemen and carriages, flowing like two streams, on both sides.

The old man asks everyone to remember the snake in honor, because the piers of this royal bridge are nothing else than her sacrificed body. The rejuvenated and made beautiful former old woman returns from her bath in the river. Her husband who wants to end their marriage because of his age, now recognizes that he is rejuvenated, too. The great shadow giant stumbles clumsily along the bridge and creates great confusion all around him. People are hurt and in danger of being thrown into the river. Yet, when approaching the court, the shadow giant stands in astonishment at what he sees with open eyes. He drops his hands, halts in the middle of the court and is locked to the ground in front of the temple. He stands there like a colossal statue of reddish glittering stone. His shadow points out the hours which are marked in a circle on the floor around him, not in numbers, but in noble and expressive emblems.

At this instant, the hawk soars aloft above the dome. He is caught by the light of the sun, and with his mirror reflects it upon the group standing at the altar. The new King, the new Queen, and their attendants, in the dusky cave of the temple, seem to be
illuminated by heavenly splendor, and the people fall upon their faces. Unexpectedly, some gold-pieces, falling from the air, come tinkling down. While the nearest people rush to pick them up, the miracle is repeated several times here and there. The will-o’-the-wisps want to have a little sport here once more before they take off by dispersing the gold, which they licked from the sunken king. Up to the present hour the bridge is swarming with travelers, and the temple is the most frequented on the whole earth, the Peters Place in Rome.
Chapter Two:

1. Botanics in the *Fairy Tale*

The *Fairy Tale* is not just an allegory. The golden, silver and bronze kings identify themselves as wisdom, appearance, and force. They are the three rulers of the earth. Goethe himself remarks that the story as a whole is not to be taken allegorically. In this context, Nicholas Boyle explains: “To draw up a table of correspondence between the names of the ‘characters’ and the names of some other entities, so that the *Fairy Tale* can be made to tell a different story from that which it appears to tell, is to fall into the trap Goethe set for his readers, and to contribute to his collection of ninety-nine misinterpretations.”

According to Boyle, the snake does not represent Kantian understanding because snakes are wise. She is not hope because she is green, and also not German eighteenth-century literature. The three kings do not correspond to the three Masonic principles, the three estates of the realm, the philosophy of Schiller or to the prophecy of Daniel. However, Nicholas Boyle admits that the *Fairy Tale* is more than what Wilhelm von Humboldt could see in it, “a free and easy play of the imagination,” which most people do not understand. It is not true that it stands in no need of explanation. The Abbé intends to remind his hearers of “nothing,” and of “everything,” and, as already mentioned, Goethe answered Humboldt that the *Fairy Tale* was “at once both significant and meaningless.” Today’s interpreters agree on the fact that the significance lies in the whole and not in the parts. The phrase “time has come” dominates the narrative. The old man’s

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9 Nicholas Boyle, Vol.2, 330
10 Teresina Zemella, 55
11 Rudolf Eppelsheimer, 34
message means, in fact, that if everyone plays their part at the crucial time, then the common effort will come to a happy conclusion. However, the story is not to be identified with Goethe’s own age. It should not be reduced to a piece of moralizing during the age of revolution. On the other hand, there are certainties in the tale. For example, it is absolutely certain that the Fairy Tale ends: the time comes; the prophecies are fulfilled; man and woman are united; all debts are cancelled; the world is changed. In contrast to the Fairy Tale, the rest of the narratives leave the impression that ordinary life can end only in renunciation or in a miracle. The Fairy Tale, however, provides an outlook into a new millennium, “…that is only in the spirit of the formula with which all fairy tales properly conclude…[it] shows us the end of history itself, as the only true end to all stories, fictional and lived: the glory which surrounds the prince and Lily is that of the kingdom of heaven in which alone the Supreme Good can be achieved.”

Interestingly, Boyle mentions a secondary interpretation, that is, the association between the Lily and the fleur-de-lis of France, the “dazzling” beauty of French freedom. They represent the premature attempt to force the ideal into reality. To this extent, the Fairy Tale could be interpreted as an esoteric expression of Goethe’s sympathy with certain French middle class contemporaries and their belief that French revolutionary methods were terribly mistaken. Schiller saw the danger in the revolutionary upheavals, opinions, and newspapers as derivations of revolutionary ideas. The “nothing” that acts as if it were a “something” equals, according Schiller’s letter to Goethe, the giant and his shadow. He directly associates this figure with the French armies.

12 Nicholas Boyle, Vol.2, 330
The pattern of all history lies in the structure of the *Fairy Tale*. Recent scholarship\(^\text{13}\) has shown that the old ferryman is a classical emblem for all beginning by chance which is the material for our ordinary individual life. The *Fairy Tale* points us towards the ideal that will be achieved by the end. The Abbé represents this knowledge in the *Conversations*; "...what looks like an 'old Fairy Tale' may in fact be a disguised version of something that happened 'in our immediate vicinity'."\(^\text{14}\)

Consequentially, it is wrong to associate Carl with the prince, or the river with the Rhine, or the Abbé with the other old man who bears the lamp. Instead a homology, a large-scale parallel must be found. Indeed, there appears a division in two parts, characterized by the premature death of the prince. The first part of the story presents the characters sequentially, the second part shows them acting together. In the beginning, they follow their individual mission to find Lily, and when they reach her they must present themselves one by one. In the second part, they act together in a ceremony,

...and the linear motion of the narrative, directed towards attaining Lily, is transformed into a rotary motion. The luminous semi-circle of the procession over the river is completed by the reflection in the waters beneath into a perfect and gorgeous circle. The procession itself completes a circular path shortly afterwards when it travels back beneath the bed of the river which it has just crossed by bridge. In the same moment the narrative comes full circle when it returns us to the ferryman's hut, transformed and glorified. Now, the two parts in the structure of the *Fairy Tale*, sequential and circular, correspond directly to the two stages, the successive stage and the flowering stage, in Goethe's account of the processes of natural growth, his essay on *The Metamorphosis of Plants*.\(^\text{15}\)

According to Goethe, during the successive phase, the plant builds up the stem. It is a linear motion from leaf to leaf. This corresponds with the storyline of the *Fairy Tale*.

\(^{13}\) Ronald D. Gray, 76  
\(^{14}\) Nicholas Boyle, 331  
\(^{15}\) Nicholas Boyle, 332
The first part consists of the sequence of characters, or episodes. However, this vegetative process comes to an end. It halts when the second stage of flowering and sexual reproduction is to begin. Otherwise, the first stage would continue indefinitely. Corresponding to his observations, Goethe believed that the basic elements in the plant’s structure, the leaves, would be arranged in a ring: “…initially the green ring of sepals, the calyx, then the full-blown circle of richly colored petals, the corolla.”\(^{16}\) This simultaneous, not sequential, arrangement of leaves is shown through the serpent’s ring around the prince’s body in the Fairy Tale. This is the sensual climax of the narrative. At this point, all participants join her in order to construct the dazzling image of rotating color. Goethe’s anatomical studies show the snake’s body as the closest to vegetation on earth. The reason is her capability for indefinite extension. She represents the self-reproduction of vegetation. Yet, this is sacrificed when the sexual phase begins. Man and woman, as representations of male and the female, unite at the center of the serpent’s ring. This corresponds to the formation of the contracted chamber of the seed-capsule inside the expanded chamber of the fruit body. According to Boyle’s interpretation a new cycle of life begins. The ferryman’s hut in which the Fairy Tale began transforms into the altar inside the temple, where the transfigured Lily and prince embrace each other.

It is evident that the temple of hymen, of sexually reproducing life, is, as Goethe remarks in the last words of his tale, ‘the most frequented on the face of the earth’. // The puzzle that the Fairy Tale presents to its readers is the puzzle that any living thing presents to those who ask for its purpose or meaning. Botany does not solve the puzzle; it merely describes the object.\(^{17}\)

\(^{16}\) Nicholas Boyle, 332

\(^{17}\) Nicholas Boyle, 333
Summary

There is evidence that the *Fairy Tale* is not just an allegory. The first part presents the characters sequentially and the second part shows them acting together. These two stages, the successive stage and the flowering stage, can be found in botanics. Goethe described the process of natural growth in his essay on *The Metamorphosis of Plants*. The storyline of the *Fairy Tale* corresponds with Goethe’s description of the plant development.

The leaf is present at all stages of the plant development. Yet, there is one moment that initiates growth. This moment of initiation is symbolized by the ferryman in the beginning of the tale. The sensual climax of the narrative is the serpent’s ring around the prince’s body. The ring symbolizes Goethe’s believe that the plant’s leaves would be arranged in a ring around the plant’s stem. It is a snake forming this ring because according to Goethe’s anatomical studies snakes were closest to vegetation on earth. They had the capability for indefinite extension. The self-reproduction of vegetation is represented in the *Fairy Tale*. In this context, the next chapter is dedicated to the function of stray-light and light.
Chapter Three:

1. Stray-Light and Light

While analyzing the original text of Goethe’s *Fairy Tale*, I found the following six categories that are related to light-appearances: light, stray-light, gold, glitter, the lamp and the absence of light as expressed through the shadow. I have explored the frequency of these categories’ appearances in the text, and, based on my findings, can put them into the following order:

Category 1: light (shining, glowing, illuminating, etc.) 47 occurrences
Category 2: stray-lights (also called *will-o-the-wisps*) 38 occurrences
Category 3: gold 33 occurrences
Category 4: appearance 31 occurrences
Category 5: the lamp 20 occurrences
Category 6: the shadow 12 occurrences

All light-appearances illustrate or describe several states of human consciousness. It should be noted that because the shadow expresses the absence of light, it is still an occurrence of light-appearance, since it can only exist where light also exists. Therefore, however, the shadow symbolizes a consequence of light rather than being an independently existing dramatis personae.
In the following chapter I explore the functions and the purposes of these six categories by analyzing them in context, that is, interpreting each category of light-appearance. Additional dramatis personae in the Fairy Tale, also contribute to the symbolism, and will be explained in the chapter dedicated to the shadow and all other characters.

Since the stray-lights, the second category in my frequency table are the first to appear in the text, the interpretation begins with an exploration of their meaning. The stray-lights that we encounter at the very beginning of Goethe’s tale symbolize a very different state of consciousness than light in the first category. They suddenly appear at midnight to the ferryman. After a long day of work, the ferryman rests in his little hut, which is located near a large river. He is awaken by two loud voices that belong to the stray-lights, or will-o’-the-wisps:

In the middle of the night, loud voices awoke him; he heard that it was travellers wishing to be carried over. Stepping out, he saw two large will-o’-the-wisps, hovering to and fro on his boat, which lay moored: they said, they were in violent haste, and should have been already on the other side.\(^{18}\)

Goethe starts his tricky, poetical and alchemical riddle immediately in the first sentence. Indeed, he plays with the human weakness to only believe what we can see or perceive with our own eyes. Someone who does not realize that the events in the very beginning symbolize something very different than any material reality can suggest may already be lost.

\(^{18}\) Thomas Carlyle, 9
In this context, Hans Endres states that the stray-lights who disturb the night rest of the ferryman by awakening him in the beginning symbolize the pure, or rational, intellect. This intellect is often received as a sudden impulse or an idea that can eventually lead to scientific findings and their inherent consequences. It is exactly this kind of intellectual impulse that often initiates progress; however, this progress is in its very nature unpredictable. Since it is unpredictable with regard to its consequences, it can lead to errors; in other words it can lead us astray, because of its unpredictability. Goethe symbolizes the beginning of an intellectual process with the picture of two stray-lights who awaken the ferryman’s intellect. However, with this awakening comes danger, which is symbolized by the fact that we meet two will-o’-the-wisps and not just one. We meet two stray-lights because our intellect is based on dualism. We can only understand things by looking dualistically at them, for instance by categorizing them as subject or object. The principle of dualism is reflected in oppositions such as above and below, right and left, positive and negative, bright and dark, right and wrong, etc. In this context, our intellect can split our perception and lead to discordant thinking and conflicting personalities. Therefore, our capacity to receive intellectual impulses and transform them into intellectual activity is twofold. The intellect has in itself positive and negative poles. The two will-o’-the-wisps lack any discipline and are depicted as funny, careless, cheeky, restless, and unscrupulous. In the Fairy Tale, this is symbolized by their behavior in the ferryman’s boat:

The old ferryman made no loitering; pushed off, and steered with his usual skill obliquely through the stream; while the two strangers whiffled and hissed together, in an unknown very rapid tongue, and every now and then broke out in
loud laughter, hopping about, at one time on the gunwale and the seats, at another on the bottom of the boat. "The boat is heeling!" cried the old man; "if you don't be quiet, it will overset; be seated, gentleman of the wisp!"

The stray-light's restlessness almost causes the boat to overturn, and the ferryman has to remind them of physical laws, in other words the law of gravitation. The stray-lights use an unknown language to communicate. With this "unknown, very rapid tongue" Goethe probably refers to sounds or tones. Modern technology provides tools to measure light-appearances, interferences and sounds in frequencies. Today, we can visualize these frequencies in order to observe their characteristics.

In this context, Hans Endres also states that the intellect locates itself between the life on earth and the life beyond it. However, it certainly does not derive from an exclusive occupation with otherworldly dimensions. Interestingly, the human intellect needs a vehicle in order to cross the dimensions. In the Fairy Tale, the vehicle is the ferryman's boat. The ferryman represents the redundant veteran in crossing the dimensions between the life on earth and the one beyond. Yet he must endure the constant teasing of the restless stray-lights with patience while transporting them across the river, or from one dimension to the other. Once on the other side of the river, he is frightened by the stray-lights' payment. They offer him gold. Gold symbolizes the product of the intellect. An intellectual product may appear as a shining, glittering work at first sight, but at second sight it often reveals itself as useless. About the ferryman's reaction we read:

"For Heaven's sake, what are you about?" cried the old man, "you will ruin me forever! Had a single piece of gold got into the water, the stream which cannot..."
suffer gold would have risen in horrid waves and swallowed both my skiff and me; and who knows how it might have fared with you in that case? Here, take back your gold." 

Does the ferryman refuse the intellectual product because it represents the negative side of scientific progress? He mentions the fury of the river that "cannot suffer gold." The stream serves as a representative of the water element. Goethe may have introduced water as a symbol for the human subconsciousness and the unconsciousness of nature. A spontaneous encounter between intellect and emotion creates mighty, if not disastrous, consequences. Modern readers are reminded of related findings in psychological research. However, in Goethe's Faust Part II, gold carries the same ambivalent characteristics or is discussed from a similar perspective. It represents a temptation, for instance an invitation to power, but no guarantee of reasonable leadership. Indeed the stray-lights themselves mention this ambivalence: "We can take nothing back, which we have once shaken from us." The text continues: "If you take no gold, you may work for nothing." Now the ferryman clearly intervenes: "You must know that I am only to be paid with fruits of the earth." However, the stray-lights are characterized by arrogance towards the earth: "Fruits of the earth? We despise them and have never tasted them." They represent restless wanderers, or the arrogant attitude of the intellect towards earthly dimensions. The stray-lights therefore symbolize intellectual scrupulousness and immaturity despite all its rapidness or speed. Rational intellect constantly commits errors as if it has lost its memory with regard to its home beyond earthly life. Goethe depicts this when the stray-lights realize that their journey has been erroneous, since they have already been where they belong, on the right side of the river. Yet, at this point in the tale

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22 Thomas Carlyle, 10
23 Carl Gustav Jung, Psychology and Alchemy
they only have a slight glimpse of foresight: "Old man! Holla, old man! The main point is forgotten!" The old ferryman does not hear them since "he had fallen quietly down that side of the river, where in the rocky spot, which the water never reached, he meant to bury the pernicious gold."24 The next dramatis personae that encounters the stray-lights is the snake. She indulges the buried stray-light gold, and grows transparent and luminous. On her way to the temple, she encounters the stray-lights and is ridiculed by them, just as the ferryman was:

At last, with much fatigue, she reached a wet rush spot in the swamp, where our two Will-o'-the-wisps were frisking to and fro. She shoved herself along to them; saluted them, was happy to meet such happy gentlemen related to her family. The lights glided towards her, skipped up over her, and laughed in their fashion. "Lady Cousin," said they, "you are of the horizontal line, yet what of that?" It is true we are related only by the look; for, observe you," here both the Flames, compressing their whole breadth, made themselves as high and peaked as possible, "how prettily this taper length beseems us gentlemen of the vertical line! Take it not amiss to us, good Lady; what family can boast of such a thing?25

The conflict between the snake's earthbound horizontality and the vertical flames symbolizes more than just difference in form. The intellect derives from an unconscious dimension, yet at the same time it is part of a quality that could be called meta-consciousness. Therefore, everything childlike or naive—as the snake represents—is teased and subject to intellectual mockery because, superficially seen, it seems to be helpless. Rational intellect is blind with regard to the inner value that is symbolically represented by the snake. The intellectual rapidness, represented by the stray-lights, is based on its resistance to gravitation: "Since there ever was a Jack-o'-lantern in the world, no one of

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24 Interestingly, the ferryman's urge to get rid of the "pernicious gold" reminds us of the problem of nuclear waste products that must be buried deeply in order to avoid direct contamination.
25 Thomas Carlyle, 12
them has either sat or lain.” However, intellect has its limits too. Goethe depicts this limit at the end of the tale when the stray-lights turn pale under the sunlight. The archetype and the unconsciousness are each still more powerful than the rational intellect. Because of its speed, the intellect has the tendency to repeatedly forget things and to ignore intuition. This context is symbolized by the restless journey of the stray-lights. Ideas and impulses are simply forms of intellectual activity. Thus we are constantly—even while asleep—occupied with certain forms of thought. Thoughts, however, are the only forms of human energy that are not earthbound through gravitation. Goethe mentions the parallel by stating: "...no one of them has either sat or lain.” Thoughts and light have similar physical characteristics that we are only able to perceive or use in a limited way due to their cosmic origins.  

Light (category one) appears more often in the text than stray-light. It symbolizes the inner way to knowledge, reflected in the term “enlightenment.” Goethe depicts the function of light most clearly in the temple scene. The communication between the snake, the old man with the lamp, and the four kings is dedicated to the character of light,

“What is grander than gold?” inquired the King. — “Light,” replied the Snake. — “What is more refreshing than light?” said he. — “Speech,” answered she.”

Goethe hints at the human capacity of speech in connection with light. The conversation in the temple refers to the fact that people are able to achieve inner experiences of light while existing in their bodies and that they express these experiences

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26 Meditation is a form of emotional control that helps many people find moments of peace and quietness and is a tool of increasing importance in modern civilization with regard to stress and disease. It is currently the most prevalent method of achieving emotional control. Meditation means, “returning to the light.”

27 Thomas Carlyle, 16
through language. Speech and light therefore belong together. Yet, the temple scene is also reminiscent of Mephistopheles, who states the following about the character of light in *Faust Part I*:

The modest truth I speak to you.  
While man, this tiny world of fools, is droll  
Enough to think himself a whole,  
I am part of the part that once was everything,  
Part of the darkness which gave birth to the light,  
The haughty light which envies mother night  
Her ancient rank and place and would be king—  
Yet it does not succeed: however it contend,  
It sticks to bodies in the end.  
It streams from bodies, it lends bodies beauty,  
A body won't let it progress;  
So it will not take long, I guess,  
And with the body it will perish too.  

Why should light perish with bodies? We know that it has cosmic origin, and exists independently from our planet. Mephistopheles is the spirit of negation. Goethe poses contradiction to Mephistopheles' statement that light perishes with bodies in the *Fairy Tale* as well as in *Faust Part II*. Doctor Faust ascends at the end of *Part II*, and in the *Fairy Tale* the young prince is saved through the magic light of the old man's lamp. He dies because he chooses or longs for the deadly embrace of the beautiful Lily:

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28 Walter Kaufmann, 1348-1358  
29 With regard to the *Fairy Tale*, it is important to note an aspect of light that is expressed in Sufist thinking, with which Goethe was familiar. Sufism actually teaches that everything is light, and that we are beings of light. We simply think that things are solid because they have particular echoes. One of the metaphors that Sufism uses to explain this phenomenon is the image of the mirror: everything is a mirror of everything else, and everything is always reflecting everything else all of the time. This is where the old mosaics of the Persians came from, the idea being that they were reflecting reality to itself. As the frequency of light changes from the less frequent oscillations of the physical realms to the finer vibrations of the more subtle realms, the nature of reflection also changes.
No, there is still a spark of the old heroic spirit sleeping in my bosom; let it start this instant into its expiring flame! If stones may rest in my bosom, let me be changed to stone; if thy touch kills, I will die by thy hands.\textsuperscript{30}

Indeed her touch kills him but how is his death described?

Consciousness forsook him; and she felt with horror the beloved burden lying on her bosom. With a shriek she started back, and the gentle youth sank lifeless from her arms upon the ground.\textsuperscript{31}

Goethe equates the prince’s life with consciousness and soul. Both have left his body, and the snake comes to help:

On the other hand, the Snake bestirred herself the more actively; she seemed to meditate deliverance; and in fact her strange movements served at least to keep away, for a little, the immediate consequences of the mischief. With her limber body, she formed a wide circle round the corpse, and seizing the end of her tail between her teeth, she lay quite still.\textsuperscript{32}

Even the body is already dead, it will be brought back to life with the help of a magical ritual. Light— not sunlight but the light of the old man’s lamp— will save the prince’s life. Light and stray-lights guide us further into the text. We read that the old man with the lamp humbly approaches the stray-lights:

“Gentlemen,” said he with the Lamp, in a respectful tone to the Lights, “I will now show you the way, and open you the passage; but you will do us an essential service, if you please to unbolt the door, by which the Sanctuary must be entered at present, and which none but you can unfasten.”\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{30} Thomas Carlyle, 32
\textsuperscript{31} Thomas Carlyle, 32
\textsuperscript{32} Thomas Carlyle, 33
\textsuperscript{33} Thomas Carlyle, 39
We know that the old man's lamp helps to save the prince's life, yet the portal to the Sanctuary, or temple, can only be opened by the stray-lights, in other words, by the intellect. The stray-lights play a crucial part in the mission of the small procession that consists of all dramatis personae. With regard to the stray-lights' behavior during this procession we find that: "The rear was closed by the two will-o'-the-wisps, who bent the peaks of their flames towards one another, and appeared to be engaged in conversation." Does their conversation symbolize a sudden renunciation of dualistic or dialectical thinking? If so, then we can assume that Goethe refers to the intellectual capacity of holistic thinking, and it is indeed going to open the golden lock of the temple:

"The Man now called upon the Lights to advance; who required small entreaty, and with their pointed flames soon ate both bar and lock."34 Are the pointed flames a symbol for glowing intellectual arguments or heated discussions? Goethe does not specify the character of light but we read, "The brass gave a loud clang, as the doors sprang suddenly asunder; and the stately figures of the Kings appeared within the Sanctuary, illuminated by the entering Lights."35 Furthermore, we know that the stray-lights return to their usual curious and cheeky behavior while in the temple. First they approach the golden, then the mixed, and finally the silver king. It is curiosity that keeps human intellect alive. This is the answer to the stray-lights' behavior. They nourish themselves through their curiosity. Yet the procession takes us further. While in the temple, the pressure of gravitation is felt, at least by everyone except the stray-lights: "... the ground began to move beneath them; the Youth and the old Woman also held by one another; the Lights alone did not regard

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34 Thomas Carlyle, 40
35 Thomas Carlyle, 40
The temple moves like a ship that, for some miraculous reason, does not encounter any kind of obstacle. There is no rock in its way, and the temple relocates to precisely the place where the ferryman's hut used to be. However, it changes form and becomes a new altar. The stray-lights appear well nourished after the temple journey, and at the end of the Fairy Tale we read:

The Lights, who till now had been employed upon him, drew to a side; they appeared, although pale in the morning radiance, yet once more well-fed, and in good burning condition; with their peaked tongues, they had dexterously licked out the gold veins of the colossal figure to its very heart.37

The intellect is satisfied. It is appropriate to believe that the gold they have licked represents wisdom, as will be discussed in detail.

Summary

Light represents a holistic phenomenon that is an inherent part of nature. It derives from the cosmos and symbolizes the stabilizing principle with regard to life on earth. Therefore, human beings can perceive and use the light as well as plants. However, the human capacity to perceive or understand the nature of light in its entirety is limited. In order to use the power of light we must first explore its capacities. We know that light can enlighten us and enhance our life forces. In this context, enlightenment also means that it is possible to find answers to questions regarding our existence on earth.

36 Thomas Carlyle, 41
37 Thomas Carlyle, 43
Goethe represents human intellect in form of stray-lights who embody the dualism of rational intellect that, however significant, has its limits. One of these limits is demonstrated by the fact that we cannot explain the nature of cosmic light in its entirety. Stray-light appears similar to cosmic light, but it differs from it in that it must constantly be nourished. In the end, the stray-lights disappear into the sunlight because they are satisfied. In this capacity, the stray-lights represent a part of the whole that must be taken seriously but must also be balanced, since it can otherwise lead to fatal errors. At the same time, our intellect is of crucial importance and useful within nature.

Humans perceive nature consciously. Our consciousness allows us to understand natural events. Plant’s succeeding leaves show greater refinement due to their exposition to air and light. Light initiates purification in plants as well as in human beings. Correspondingly it is the release of inward, unconscious forces that leads to a pure state of mind. In this state of mind a resolution of duality in unity is achieved. Light has purifying capacities on human consciousness. The next chapter is dedicated to the function of the lamp in the tale. It will be shown that the lamp represents an inner light that corresponds to the explained outer categories of light.
2. The Lamp

The old man’s lamp produces a light that does not have a shadow. Therefore, it seems to be a different kind of light than the other categories. In the text, we read about this lamp when the old man appears for the first time. He suddenly appears in the temple:

A Man of middle stature, entering through the cleft, attracted the attention of the Snake. He was dressed like a peasant, and carried in his hand a little Lamp, on whose still flame you liked to look, and which in a strange manner, without casting any shadow, enlightened the whole dome.
“Why comest you, since we have light?” said the golden King. 38

It is interesting that modern physicists do not know any light that does not cast any shadow. The questioning comment of the golden king is even more interesting. The temple already has light. The lamp may, therefore, symbolize an inner light or human intuition. 39 Yet the communication in the temple continues. The old man says: “You know that I may not enlighten what is dark.” This is proof that Goethe intends a category of light with the lamp. The dialogue that now enfolds in the temple refers to the question who will reign the empire in the future. Although we do not know which reign is meant, we are informed that something may change, however, the character of this change is not explained:

“Will my kingdom end?” said the silver King.
“Late or never,” said the old Man.
With a stronger voice the brazen king began to ask: “When shall I arise?”
“Soon,” replied the Old Man.
“With whom shall I combine?” said the King.
“With thy elder brothers,” said the Man.

38 Thomas Carlyle, 17
39 Ronald D. Gray, 173 [Divine Light] and Rudolf Eppelsheimer, 39 [Laterna Magica]
“What will the youngest do?” inquired the King.
“He will sit down,” replied the Man.
“I am not tired,” cried the fourth King, with a rough, faltering voice.  

According to Hans Endres’s interpretation, the old man’s lamp, or its intuitive function, means mental and spiritual vigilance. The old man and his lamp are a symbol of continuing watchfulness. He represents someone who uses his or her intuition in order to do the right thing at the right time. The old man symbolizes such people who never sleep, not even at night. Those people are able to act at the right moment because they defend themselves against any worldly distractions. They remain focused and balanced, using their intuition as a compass through life. The old man’s sudden appearance in the temple symbolizes intellectual watchfulness. Yet his lamp will do more in the Fairy Tale. As I have already mentioned with regard to light and stray-lights, the old man’s lamp saves the prince’s life. It is the lamp that shows him the right way at the right time. First, the lamp leads its owner into the temple as well as out again. The four kings represent the ruling regime, and as such, they incorporate four principles of power. However, this will be discussed with regard to gold and appearance. More important at this point is the fact that the old man’s lamp possesses a certain transformational force. When leaving the temple, we read about the lamp:

All the passages, through which the old Man traveled, filled themselves, immediately behind him, with gold; for his Lamp had the strange property of changing stone into gold, wood into silver, dead animals into precious stones, and of annihilating all metals. But to display this power, it must shine alone. If another light were beside it, the lamp only cast from it a pure clear brightness, and all living things were refreshed by it.  

40 Thomas Carlyle, 17
41 Hans Endres, 19 ff.
42 Thomas Carlyle, 18
Another aspect to the lamp is that it also represents the light of the truth. Goethe is showing the transformational force of truth through the symbol of the lamp. It is this power that raises all things to a higher level of existence. Expressed in modern terms, we would say that the frequencies are raised. If this is, indeed, the solution to the riddle, or the meaning of the lamp, we can also see that the truth exists beyond all things. Truth exists for itself, and it only takes effect when nothing interferes. However, as soon as other factors have a negative effect on truth, such as other interests, the transformational force of truth will be diminished. In this case, we would just remember true moments as pleasant and soothing experiences. The old man’s lamp must shine alone in order to achieve transformations. Otherwise, its refreshing effects are simply diminished into a pleasant shine. The transformations that are produced by the lamp change the life of creatures as well as of vegetation.

In the *Fairy Tale* we read that living organisms die and dead organisms transform to life again. Goethe depicts natural processes as things that intensify and accelerate in both directions; they become and they pass away. It is interesting to note that pure energy is stronger than any materialized form of life, that is, pure energy travels much faster through the universe than any earthbound energy. Gravitation slows energy down, and transforms it into matter which was, to some extent, illustrated through the encounter between the vertical stray-lights and the horizontal snake. However, with regard to the lamp’s transformational power towards the little Mops that lives in his hut, we read next in the text:

Meantime the fire on the hearth had burnt low; the old Man covered-up the embers with a heap of ashes, and put the glittering gold-pieces aside; so that his
Due to the lamp’s magic light, the walls coat themselves with gold, and Mops transforms into a beautiful sculpture. Goethe uses a strong symbol at this point, an animal creature is raised to the high level of an artwork. While these transformations are surprising and astonishing for the reader, it seems that all dramatis personae are familiar with such occurrences. At least we read that the prince is well informed about the old man’s lamp, and is very aware of its transformational potential: “He inquired narrowly about the Man with the Lamp, about the influences of the sacred light, appearing to expect much good from it in his melancholy case.” Interesting is the connection between the sacred light and youth’s consciousness. This connection appears as a presentment of the prince’s near future, a kind of de ja vu. It seems as if he already knows that the lamp’s sacred light and the characteristic movements of the snake will save his life. Beforehand we encounter the fair Lily, who enjoys graciously her new gift, the little Mops of onyx. He will be her comrade. Her song mentions explicitly the lamp’s sacred light:

This Dog of Onyx, that can never fail me?
And coming at the Lamp’s command?44

It sounds as if she asks whether other transformations are possible, including her own. Goethe soon gives us another hint with regard to transformation through light, when

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43 Thomas Carlyle, 20
44 Thomas Carlyle, 28
the Lily urges the old man’s wife to place the little canary bird under the light of the lamp:

“Wait a moment,” said the fair Lily, “and carry my little bird with you. Bid the Lamp change it into topaz; I will enliven it by my touch; with your good Mops it shall form my dearest past time: but hasten, hasten; for, at sunset, intolerable putrefaction will fasten on the hapless bird, and tear asunder the fair combination of its form forever. 45

The reign of the beautiful Lily represents the dimension beyond all life. In this reign we find dramatis personae who are dead, or in other words, without consciousness in reference to their existence. Yet they do exist, and their bodies can decay and decompose unless the lamp’s light intervenes at the right time. 46 Goethe’s symbol of this magic lamp refers to power that seems to interfere with certain gravitational forces causing decomposition. However, characters are killed by the touch of the mysterious Lily before the lamp can intervene. The text continues depicting the death of the young prince. A race begins against time’s decomposing effects on his body, and while the snake provides temporary protection by forming a circle around him, she urges to bring the man and his lamp as fast as possible: “Who gets us the Man with the Lamp, before the sunset?” hissed the Snake, faintly, but audibly. 47 The snake gives the important sign, and draws the right conclusion. She shakes all the figures into action:

“Forget your own care,” said the Snake, “and try to bring help here; perhaps it may come to yourself also. Haste with your utmost speed to seek the Will-o’-wisps; it is too light for them to see them, but perhaps you will hear them

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45 Thomas Carlyle, 29
46 Interestingly, modern science cannot explain to this date how the atoms of our bodies hold together, in other words, gravitation is still an open riddle.
47 Thomas Carlyle, 34
laughing and hopping to and fro. If they be speedy, they may cross upon the Giant shadow, and seek the Man with the Lamp, and send him to us."48

It is interesting to note that the snake suggests to first find the stray-lights. The stray-lights, symbol for rational intellect, must cooperate with the shadow who symbolizes unconscious nature and its elementary forces, in order to find the old man with the lamp. Yet, what is even more interesting is that the old woman who still owes three vegetables to the river has to forget her suffering in order to help and be helped. Since she fears losing her hand, this is not an easy task for her. Saving the prince’s life is the first priority, and it is her husband whose lamp is going to create this miracle. We read about the urgency of his arrival:

The Woman hurried off at her quickest pace, and the Snake seemed expecting as impatiently as Lily the return of the Flames. Alas! The beam of the sinking Sun was already gliding only the highest summits of the trees in the thicket, and long shadows were stretching over lake and meadow; the Snake hitched up and down impatiently, the lily dissolved in tears. In this extreme need, the snake kept looking round on all sides; for she was afraid every moment that the Sun would set, and corruption penetrate the magic circle, and the fair youth immediately moulder away.49

Its the old man who hands the basket full of vegetables and the onyx mops and sends his wife to the river which caused her to be at risk. He is the one to save the prince from mouldering away and his wife from losing her hand. Yet the following events are most mysterious as well. We read about the arrival of the old man:

At last she [the snake] noticed sailing high in the air, with purple-red feathers, the Prince’s Hawk, whose breast was catching the last beams of the Sun. She shook

48 Thomas Carlyle, 34
49 Thomas Carlyle, 34
herself for joy at this good omen; nor was she deceived; for shortly afterwards the Man with the Lamp was seen gliding towards them across the Lake, fast and smoothly, as if he had been traveling on skates.\(^{50}\)

The old man appears “on the scene” without being called directly. He hovers across the lake, just as Jesus Christ in the Bible. This suggests that the old man symbolizes a spiritual leader, in other words, he could be Jesus or an avatar because he obviously knows the answer to the secret of human existence, which Goethe indicates through the use of Biblical reference.\(^{51}\) However, there also is a scientific explanation to the figure of the old man. He symbolizes the completion of the human species. Only the old man carries the light of truth, the light that does not produce a shadow, that is, the light of consciousness. The old man explains his sudden arrival as following:

“The spirit of my Lamp,” replied the Man, “has impelled me, and the Hawk has conducted me. My Lamp sparkles when I am needed, and I just look about me in the sky for a signal; some bird or meteor points to the quarter towards which I am turn.\(^{52}\)

The relevant symbol is “the spirit of his lamp.” This symbol represents human intuition. However, intuition or the magically spirited lamp can only be seen or recognized by such individuals who already have an idea or presentment about intuitive consciousness. Therefore, intuitive consciousness is represented through the symbol of the spirited lamp. It was the snake who could already foresee intuition’s helpful contribution. She called for the old man’s arrival.

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\(^{50}\) Thomas Carlyle, 34-35
\(^{51}\) Hans Endres, 19
\(^{52}\) Thomas Carlyle, 35
Yet there is other symbolic meaning to be analyzed. The old man mentions two symbols: the bird’s aerodynamic orientation and the astronomic alignment with the stars. The latter was a useful tool of navigation for centuries, and the bird’s routes are not yet fully explored by scientists. Furthermore, this is the first passage where we can read that the lamp’s magic light itself is conscious. Physics does not indicate the existence of conscious light yet. However, the force of light is the strongest and fastest force we know so far. Therefore, light and its force achieves indeed a unique importance with regard to evolutionary processes. Experiments in quantum physics lead us into a new age. This is an age in which causal thinking and mechanistic world views can no longer explain new light-phenonema sufficiently.

The moment when the old man appears in the *Fairy Tale* does not refer to measurable mechanistic time. It is not time in the sense of a mechanic clockworks. It is, rather, a different duration of time, that is, time does not behave as we think it does. Goethe transforms the shadow at the end of the *Fairy Tale*. The shadow turns into a sunclock. This sunclock is measuring time by simply using sunlight, a holistic suggestion. The lamp’s light possesses holistic healing potential. The healing process is first expressed through its effect on the old woman’s vanishing hand:

In spite of the assurance of her husband, that her hand could diminish no farther, while the Lamp shone on it, she asserted more than once, that if things went on thus, before midnight this noble member would have utterly vanished.

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53 Arthur Zajonc and Fritjof Capra - Test results are paradox with regard to light’s behavior, and scientists urge for a turning point in modern thinking. The new thinking is characterized by wholeness. Holistic thinking is way to explain the paradox phenomena that quantum physics observes with regard to the exploration of light.

54 Thomas Carlyle, 36
Goethe connects the symbol of the lamp with the ability to believe in conscious light. Whereas the old man is convinced by experience, his wife doubts the lamp’s potential, that is, she believes her hand will disappear sooner or later. Another point of interest is that the old man interferes with the mouldering of the prince’s body after looking at the stars. Even though the stray-lights, symbolizing intellectual ideas, critically discussed the issue of the prince’s rebirth, the old man does not listen to them but simply looks at the stars. There, in the cosmos, he sees something that tells him the time, the right time, to interfere:

The old Man looked to the stars, and than began speaking: “We are assembled at the propitious hour; let each perform his task, let each do this duty; and a universal happiness will swallow-up our individual sorrows, as a universal grief consumes individual joys."

This passage probably represents metaphysical significance. Goethe suggests to view the old man himself from a bird’s eye, in other words, to read the text based on transcendental thinking. The emotional states of happiness and unhappiness are only to be understood from the standpoint of philosophical identification with worldly matters. Yet, the old man takes another standpoint. Would he otherwise look at the stars? What is looking for? He looks at that light millions of years away. Millions of light years enable

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55 Thomas Carlyle, 36
56 Hans Endres, 56 - Not even Jesus Christ or avatar can help as long as everybody else joins in helping at the right moment. The important thing is exactly this moment because it describes the meaning of time with regard to eternity, that is eternity in the moment. There is no doubt that a certain event is approaching, yet the exact moment of this event is uncertain. Most of the time this moment appears exactly when we are not prepared for it, totally unexpected and surprising. Therefore, most of the people will miss this moment, that is, sleep it away. These people are old fogeys who will always and everywhere be too late. Finally, evolution will step over these people with relentlessness. Therefore, only those of us who will be awake day and night, in other words, those who remain intuitively conscious, will be able to act in the right moment. However, to achieve the ability of intuitive consciousness means to remain undistracted by external forces. This is the meaning of mental alertness, the individual ability to consciously intervene in happening events at the right time.
the old man to talk about the hour of universal happiness. He connects with a form of universal consciousness, knowing that he is part of the force represented through stars. Since he is consciously part of cosmic light, he can announce its expression on earth.

Summary

The old man and his lamp symbolize continuing watchfulness. This watchfulness enables people to use their intuition in the right way. The intuition serves as a compass through life. It leads into the right direction with instinctive security and serves as an inner light of understanding. The lamp also represents transformational forces. These transformations are produced by the lamp and change the life of all creatures in the Fairy Tale.

Goethe depicts natural processes as things that go in both directions, they become and they pass away. These symbols serve to explain the importance of aligning human consciousness with evolution on earth. Human consciousness must be harmonized with universal laws. The lamp, representing intuitive consciousness, plays an important part in this context. In the Fairy Tale the lamp’s magic shine creates miracles helping to save the prince’s life. In evolution it will be intuitive consciousness that may save the earth. Yet, this intuitive consciousness can be corrupted by outer influences. The next chapter is dedicated to material distractions that can manipulate the human mind in the wrong direction.
3. Gold and Glitter

The category gold is mentioned thirty-three times in the original text. Similar to the symbolic context of gold in Goethe's *Faust II*, this category is related to light by representing highly ambiguous qualities. On the one hand, the golden king in the *Fairy Tale* symbolizes wisdom to reign. On the other hand, it represents the counterpart of wisdom, that is, the greed for ostensible causes or values. Goethe explains this ambivalence through the sudden death of little Mops. Mops dies because he eats the stray-light's hypocritical gold. His sudden death illustrates symbolically that materialistic craving for gold can lead to one's undoing. In the text we can read about the old woman's comment on the stray-light's causing Mops' death:

Look round there what a farce the walls have; look at the old stones, which I have not seen these hundred years; every film of gold have they licked away, thou couldst not think how fast; and still they kept assuring me that it tasted far beyond common gold. Once they had swept the walls, the fellows seemed to be in high spirits, and truly in that little while they had grown much broader and brighter. They now began to be impertinent again, they patted me, and called me their queen, they shook themselves, and a shower of gold-pieces sprang from them; see how they are shining there under the bench! But ah, what misery! Poor Mops ate a coin or two; and look, he is lying in the chimney, dead. Poor Pug. 57

Goethe discusses two kinds of gold, the gold film that covered the walls and the stray-light's fictitious gold. We read that it is the stray-light's gold that kills Mops. Yet his death seems to play a secondary role. Interesting is the fact that Mops dies after eating the dream gold but the snake survives. Goethe seems to indicate that fictitious, or in other

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57 Thomas Carlyle, 19
words, unreal, gold has the potential to destroy some while it heals and nourishes others. It is the intention and attitude towards gold that makes the difference.

The symbol of the golden king in the temple explains the gold's twofold potential and the relationship between gold and light: "What is grander than gold?" inquires the golden king. "Light," replies the snake. Yet Goethe does not indicate that gold symbolizes materialized light. The symbol gold serves rather as a byproduct of the symbol light. In this context, it is interesting to explore which attitude towards gold would be the best. Goethe expects his audience to be familiar with deeply symbolical references with regard to the snake. These references derive not only from the Biblical context where the snake represents temptation, but also from mythology.

The snake in Goethe's *Fairy Tale* symbolizes the unconscious wisdom of nature rather than temptation in terms of Christianity. The unconscious wisdom of nature has positive effects as it is symbolized through the snake's raised head. Yet it can also have negative effects which would be symbolized through the snake's lowered head. However, it is exactly this unconsciousness of nature that needs to profit from human conscious intelligence in order to be positively influenced. Goethe illustrates this fact by the snake's indulgence in the stray-light's dream gold. The snake experiences the stray-light's gold pieces as a blessing:

Scarcely had she swallowed them, when, with extreme delight, she began to feel the metal melting in her inwards, and spreading all over her body; and soon, to her lively joy, she observed that she was grown transparent and luminous. 58

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58 Thomas Carlyle, 11
Nature's unconsciousness can be positively manipulated by human intelligence. Goethe also illustrates this fact in the snake's encounter with the golden king in the temple. The king tells her that light as a symbol for better intellectual understanding leads to communication: "What is more refreshing than light?" said he. "Speech," answered she. Yet what Goethe really intends to say is that human intellect fulfils its legitimate task only when it is used to create positive effects on nature, not vice versa. This task is represented by the snake's transparency.

Transparency symbolizes the act of becoming self-conscious. The snake finds the answer to her existence. This could also be described as a healing process. Therefore, she craves for the stray-light's gold as a symbol of intellectual impulses that she can use for good. The fictitious gold symbolizing human intelligence does not damage nature but is useful for it when all knowledge transforms into wisdom. In this context, the snake's horizontality represents humbleness and willingness, whereas the stray-light's verticality symbolizes mental activities as part of human nature. Goethe incorporates a prophecy with regard to the relationship between human consciousness and nature:

Long ago she [the snake] had been told that this was possible; but now being doubtful whether such a light could last, her curiosity and the desire to be secure against the future, drove her from her cell, that she might see who it was that had shaken-in this precious metal.59

It will be the fruitful connection between nature's horizontality and human verticality that will bring about blessings. However, the stray-lights seem to be arrogant and the snake tolerates them. She knows that her light, nature's wisdom, and their light,

59 Thomas Carlyle, 11
human intelligence, are only seemingly related. Goethe illustrates this symbolic relationship as following:

She shoved herself along to them; saluted them, was happy to meet such happy gentlemen related to her family. The lights glided towards her, skipped up over her, and laughed in their fashion. "Lady Cousin," said they, "you are of the horizontal line, yet what of that?" It is true we are related only by the look; for, observe you," here both the Flames, compressing their whole breadth, made themselves as high and peaked as possible.  

This interaction explains the co-relation of nature and intellect. Nature is thankful for intellectual impulses. Nature serves human beings patiently. However, this co-relation does achieve an almost impossible degree, in the sense that nature is willing to destroy itself in favor of human beings survival. The stray-lights do not accept the snake. Goethe symbolizes the intellect's tendency to not be limited or to obey nature's laws. The stray-lights do not want to get involved with the snake, as human intellect keeps out of nature's laws. According to this unequal co-relation, the snake, that is, nature, acts correspondingly:

The Snake felt exceedingly uncomfortable in the company of these relations; for, they let her hold her head as high as possible, she found that she must bend it to the earth again, would she stir from the spot; and if in the dark thicket she had been extremely satisfied with her appearance, her splendor in the presence of these cousins seemed to lessen every moment, nay she was afraid that at last it would go entirely.  

Human beings are often not conscious about the limits of human intelligence, whereas nature's wisdom is naturally characterized by limitations. Goethe indicates that

60 Thomas Carlyle, 12
61 Thomas Carlyle, 12
wisdom of nature includes awareness of limitations from the beginning of this planet. The snake will sacrifice herself in the *Fairy Tale*, which is an ambivalent view of the future illustrated by Goethe. He reminds us that evolution progresses relentlessly and we have to do some rethinking with regard to nature’s laws that also govern our existence.

In the temple scene we learn how such a process of rethinking is characterized. Goethe mentions speech as a tool of communication. It is not enough to understand, we also must communicate that which we consciously know. The kings represent human rules of government, or principles of power. Therefore, the kings symbolize human beings in nature, that is, the human control or mastery of command over nature. Yet Goethe clearly intends progress and guidance as it is illustrated in the Bible. Adam has to cultivate the earth. However, that does not necessarily symbolize agriculture and farming. It could symbolize highly conscious control of nature. As long as man has existed on earth, he has only fulfilled these tasks more or less consciously. The four kings in the temple symbolize human control over nature.

**Summary**

Gold can kill or revitalize. It represents a natural resource that can destroy some while it heals others. The difference is made through the attitude and intention towards gold. Correspondingly human intelligence can kill or succeed depending on how knowledge is used. Rational knowledge must transform into human wisdom in order to bring about positive change. This wisdom can be achieved by humbleness and willingness of understanding nature’s processes. The ongoing exploitation of natural
resources is not the solution of human problems. We may find better solutions for future problems if we think less fatalistically. Gold and glitter also represent fake image or prestige. In this sense, the mixed king represents all that remains when fake, external power becomes hollow, empty, brittle and cracked. To this extent, the temple scene teaches us that we do not possess a sufficient understanding of nature yet. We are continuously learning about nature's processes. The next chapter is dedicated to the all characters who are positively affected by light and, therefore, learning to understand nature.
Chapter Four:

1. The Shadow and the Dramatis Personae

In this context it will be explored the function of individual dramatis personae as well as their perception of light. I begin with my interpretation of the shadow, or giant, who is mentioned twelve times in the original text of Goethe's *Fairy Tale*.

The giant shadow symbolizes ungainly and rough forces of nature. While these forces usually sleep in unconsciousness, they need the contribution of people in order to take well-aimed effects. This has already been discussed with regard to the snake's function in the *Fairy Tale*. Goethe uses the symbol of the lonely, unconscious shadow to show that elementary forces of nature can create major damage or disastrous consequences for our existence. However, since these forces do not possess consciousness, they are not responsible for their effects. The giant shadow unconsciously causes damage by eating three vegetables from the old woman's basket. He does not know the consequences of his behavior. The negative consequences derive from the fact that the number of vegetables in the old woman's basket symbolizes an alchemical balance. They are three times three vegetables, nine in all, which number represents transformation in terms of cabalistic traditions.

Transformation also means subconscious work or processes. With regard to the encounter between the giant shadow and the old woman, we read in the text:

She had traveled on for some time, in a sullen humor, when she halted suddenly in fright, for she had almost trod upon the Giant's shadow, which was stretching towards her across the plain. And now, lifting up her eyes, she saw the monster of
a Giant himself, who had been bathing in the River, and was just come out, and she knew not how she should avoid him. The moment he perceived her, he began saluting her in sport, and the hands of his shadow caught hold of the basket. With dexterous ease they picked away from it a Cabbage, an Artichoke and an Onion, and brought them to the Giant's mouth, who then went his way up the River, and let the Woman go in peace.  

The unconsciousness demands its tribute, and this tribute is related to the number nine. It makes a difference if there are nine or six vegetables in the basket, since the remaining number of only six vegetables symbolizes, in the cabalistic sense, the counterpart of nine. Endres has published about numerology and writes in this context:

These numbers, six and nine, stand in a polar conflict to each other. The subconsciousness is not satisfied with a lesser tribute. Therefore it will follow strictly the laws that are implied in the numerological laws.  

The shadow causes negative consequences for the old woman. She will be punished exactly in the area in which she is most sensitive, her beauty. Subconscious processes become very unpleasant when they are addressed insufficiently, in other words, when we do not pay the required tribute to our needs in this regard. Our subconsciousness knows exactly our points of weakness, therefore, it will not accept any excuses or arguments. The subconscious represents the relentless custodian of psychological laws. It functions as a guardian of consciousness. However, the consciousness must be in balance with natural laws. Goethe illustrates this with the ferryman's reaction to the missing vegetables:

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62 Thomas Carlyle, 21
63 Hans Endres, 31
As the Ferryman found only two of each sort, he grew angry, and declared he would have none of them. “What belongs to me,” said he, “I must leave nine hours in a heap, touching none of it, till I have given the River its third.”

The ferryman refuses any compromise. However, there is a way of compensation:

There is still another way. If you’d like to pledge yourself to the River, and declare yourself its debtor, I will take the six pieces; but there is some risk in it.

The old woman follows his suggestion by immersing her hand in the river. Her act symbolizes that she is willing to vouch for the subconsciousness, represented by the river. The conversation between the ferryman and the old woman continues:

“If I keep my word, I shall run no risk?” — “Not the smallest. Put your hand into the stream,” continued he, “and promise that within four-and-twenty hours you will pay the debt.”

Since she promises to pay her debts in twenty-four hours, she should not run any risk. It is interesting to note that she is the wife of the old man with the lamp who represents human completion. She represents a rather primitive state of consciousness, and appears to be the exact counterpart of him. The old woman seems to symbolize the eternal femininity, a small version of worldly woman. In the text we can read about her childlike naivety and her egocentrism that come to light when she puts her hand into the river:

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64 Thomas Carlyle, 21
65 Thomas Carlyle, 22
66 Thomas Carlyle, 22
The old Woman did so; but what was her affright, when on drawing out her hand, she found it black as coal! She loudly scolded the old Ferryman; declared that her hands had always been the fairest part of her; that in spite of her hard work, she had all along contrived to keep these noble members white and dainty. She looked at the hand with indignation, and exclaimed in a despairing tone: “Worse and worse! Look, it is vanishing entirely; it is grown far smaller than the other.” “For the present it but seems so,” said the old Man; “if you do not keep your word, however, it may prove so in earnest. The hand will gradually diminish, and at length disappear altogether, though you have the use of it as formerly. Everything as usual you will be able to perform with it, only nobody will see it.” — “I had rather that I could not use it, and no one could observe the want,” cried she: “but what of that, I will keep my word, and rid myself to this black skin, and all anxieties about it.”

At the first sight, the old woman seems to be totally wrapped up in the physical world, that is, she does not understand the deeper meaning of the situation she is involved in. Besides she does not understand her own contribution to the situation. She does not care as much about the future use of her hand as she fears to lose the visual appearance of it. Therefore, she moves on, promising to pay her debts in time. Her beauty is her major motivation to rid herself of the black skin and all anxieties about it.

The old woman leads us to the prince. In this context it is important to explore the symbolic meaning of the prince. He differs from all other figures, and is described as outsider who walks alone along the riverside while being immersed in his pain:

Thereupon she hastily took up her basket, which mounted of itself over her head, and hovered free above her in the air, as she hurried after the Youth, who was walking softly and thoughtfully down the bank... With bare soles, he walked composedly over the hot sand; and a deep inward sorrow seemed to blunt him against all external things.
The youth dreams while being submerged in his own world of thoughts, in other words, he is not self-conscious yet. He refuses any conversation with the old woman and awakes only when she mentions the beautiful Lily:

"You walk too slow for me, worthy sir; I must not lose a moment, for I have to pass the River on the green Snake, and carry this fine present from my husband to the fair Lily." So saying she stept faster forward; but the fair Youth pushed on with equal speed, and hastened to keep up with her. "You are going to the fair Lily?" cried he; "then our roads are the same." 69

His longing for the beautiful Lily symbolizes the yearning for the fulfillment of human existence. The youth represents someone who refuses all material values and external pleasures. Now he is searching for true happiness that lasts. He explains to the old woman that he lost his empire in the past:

This mails which I have honorably borne in war, this purple which I sought to merit by a wise reign, Destiny has left me; the one as a useless burden, the other as an empty ornament. Crown, and scepter, and sword are gone; and I am as bare and needy as any other son of earth. 70

The happiness or answer to the youth's question about a meaningful existence lies in the beautiful Lily. However, he is aware that the encounter with Lily could be dangerous:

For so unblessed are her bright eyes, that they take from every living creature they look-on all its force, and those whom the touch of her does not kill are changed to the state of shadows wandering alive. 71

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69 Thomas Carlyle, 23
70 Thomas Carlyle, 24
71 Thomas Carlyle, 24
The youth wanders restless on earth until he encounters Lily. Yet Lily does not symbolize a human being. She represents a new state of consciousness. In order to achieve this state of consciousness one must undergo the threshold experience of death. This threshold is dangerous. Therefore, the text states that those who are not killed by her touch remain unconscious.

In this context it is interesting to explore the connection between the function of the beautiful Lily\textsuperscript{72} in the *Fairy Tale* and Katharina von Klettenberg in Goethe’s life. Therefore, I include Goethe’s comments on Klettenberg in his autobiography, *Dichtung und Wahrheit* (Poetry and Truth). We will examine how closely is the *Fairy Tale* connected to this period of Goethe’s life is. It was Katharina von Klettenberg who helped the young Goethe to recover from his tumor, the most dangerous threat to his health during his youth. She introduced him to alchemical literature as well as to practical experiments in this field. In *Dichtung und Wahrheit* Goethe describes her:

She is the one whose conversations and letters, the ‘confessions of a beautiful soul’ (Bekenntnisse der schoenen Seele), have contributed to inclusions in ‘Wilhelm Meister.’ She was of fragile stature, and of middle height, her heartfelt and natural behavior became even more pleasing by her courtly manners...She viewed her disease as a necessary part of her temporary existence on earth; she suffered with greatest patience, and in painless intervals she was very alive and talkative. Her favorite, or maybe her only entertainment consisted in ethical and moral experiences that a human being can make while observing him / herself. These experiences led to a religious way of thinking that were, in her case, a genially consideration of natural or supernatural kind...Now she found in me some thing she needed, a young, and vital creature who, however, strived for an unknown salvation. Yet this creature, although it could not think of himself as being sinful, was not in a comfortable situation with regard to its ailing body and soul.\textsuperscript{73}

\textsuperscript{72} In this context Adam MacLean refers to Lilith in the Judeo tradition. She was the first seductress of Adam. According to this tradition she appeared before Eva.

\textsuperscript{73} Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, translation *Dichtung und Wahrheit* Bd. 12, 374-375
In this context, Goethe described this period in which a tumor on his neck and the weakness of his body restricted him to his bed as a time of increasing "...restlessness, ...impatience, ...striving, ...searching, ...exploration, ...reflection, and indecision." Furthermore, he explains Klettenberg's reaction to his situation. She ensures him that he suffers the lack of reconciliation with God, a thought to which the young Goethe violently objects. Goethe says in this context: "It is easy and well to assume how I and my friend had arguments with regard to this point." However, Klettenberg convinces the young Goethe and his mother of the fact that the salvation of a soul is too closely related to that of the body, and therefore, neither should be ignored. Klettenberg began studying Welling’s "Opus-mago-cabbalisticum," while always looking to her friend, Goethe, who shared her experience of exchange of light and darkness inherent in Welling's work. Goethe describes with excellent humor his own curiosity towards the subject of alchemy:

It only required the slightest impulse in order to infiltrate me with this kind of disease as well. I purchased the work that found its family tree in a straight line with the school of neo-platonism, as well as all other works in this field.

With regard to the *Fairy Tale* it is interesting to note that Lily is described as a pure and beautiful soul. In this way, she incorporates the counterpart to the old woman. Whereas the old woman represents undeveloped femininity, Lily symbolizes the perfect

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74 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, translation *Dichtung und Wahrheit* Bd. 12, 375  
75 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, translation *Dichtung und Wahrheit* Bd. 12, 376  
76 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, translation *Dichtung und Wahrheit* Bd. 12, 377
and complete image of the eternal feminine. Lily lives in worldly isolation having no
conscious relation to the earth. Also she lacks a conscious understanding with regard to
her true being. Her supernatural existence is reminiscent of Goethe’s description of
Klettenberg, whose transcendental thinking found its reasons in her ailing health.

Lily’s garden resembles heavenly realms in the sense that it does not seem to be a
location of worldly dimension. Goethe’s symbol could be interpreted as an environment
that lacks important elements such as oxygen, and therefore it damages or kills all mortal
beings. Or, it could be interpreted as a form of higher frequencies of energy or light,
probably of cosmic origin, that could destroy earthbound energy. Whatever case maybe,
natural life cannot survive any eye contact with or touch by the beautiful Lily.

Summary

The shadow is a symbol for unconscious nature. Through the figure of the shadow
a confrontation with the subconsciousness is initiated. This confrontation is symbolized
by the river. The shadow steals three vegetables from the old woman’s basket. These
vegetables were meant to be given to the river, as a tribute to the subconsciousness. Since
the shadow has intervened and disturbed nature’s balance, the ferryman reminds us that
the alchemical balance must be recreated in a different way. This alchemical balance also
corresponds to a psychological balance between the subconscious and the conscious. It
can only be maintained by paying the required tribute in a different way. The old woman
reestablishes this alchemical balance by sacrificing her beauty. She temporarily sacrifices
the image of her hand, and therewith her self-image, in order to achieve a higher state of consciousness.

The prince symbolizes the longing for completion and salvation. This salvation often cannot be realized in the material world. Therefore, he yearns for contact with the beautiful Lily, a symbol for the beautiful soul who lives beyond this world. She lives in heavenly realms that can be reached by humans through consciousness. However, the journey to the beautiful Lily or the realm of the soul is dangerous. It leads to threshold experiences. The next chapter is dedicated to such experiences.
2. Transformation and Death

In the context of all occurring transformations in Goethe’s Fairy Tale, the symbolical meaning of death will be of central interest. Death as a threshold experience plays an important part. We read that Mops dies after eating the stray-light’s gold, that the little canary bird dies after touching the beautiful Lily, that the prince suffers the same destiny as the little bird, and that the snake sacrifices her life for the rebirth of the young prince. Furthermore, we read that flowers wilt, leaves wither, and that fruits decompose while sprouts grow rampant in Lily’s garden. We already know about the transformations of Mops into an artwork of onyx, the little canary bird into a beautiful topaz, and the snake’s body into thousands of precious stones. In the text we read about the snake’s prior transformation into a glittering bridge:

But it was with no small wonder that the party saw, when they approached the River, a glorious arch mount over it, by which the helpful Snake was affording them a glittering path. If by day they had admired the beautiful transparent precious stones, of which the Bridge seemed formed; by night they were astonished at its gleaming brilliancy. On the upper side the clear circle marked itself sharp against the dark sky, but below, vivid beams were darting to the center, and exhibiting the fairy firmness of the edifice. The procession slowly moved across it; and the Ferryman, who saw it from his hut afar off, considered with astonishment the gleaming circle, and the strange lights which were passing over it.  

First of all, we know that the transparent precious stones appear differently at night than they do during daytime. Goethe’s symbol of the snake’s bridge must be interpreted in the context of human consciousness that differs between day and night.  

During the day, human consciousness is affected or characterized by the influence of

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77 Thomas Carlyle, 37
sunlight. Therefore, we would perceive precious stones as transparent and shining. In this context, our consciousness is affected by different light frequencies than it is at night. Our visual perception is transformed by sunlight into a clear, daytime conception. However, the snake’s transformation into a bridge takes place at night, which means that it is perceived in a dreamlike state of consciousness by all figures.

At this point, the small procession of wanderers experiences the bridge in its gleaming brilliancy. To better understand Goethe’s symbol of a bridge of light it must be considered where the small procession of figures is moving to. They approach the other river side by using the light-bridge, and that is the side of the ferryman’s hut. It is the location where the Fairy Tale started. The ferryman observes the appearances of light with astonishment.

The phenomena that occur with regard to the light-bridge are reminiscent of known visual interferences from physics, such as colored spectrums and mirror effects. Therefore, we are confused by the simultaneous appearance of precious stones. These precious stones could be interpreted as prisms that would be perceived, by human eyes, as firm bodies even though they consist of light. It requires a different state of consciousness in order to understand the bridge symbol. However, Goethe does not simply refer to a hallucination—the wanderers are indeed crossing the bridge.

Since the bridge is made of light, we do not know what holds it together. Besides, we read in the text about the next transformation of this bridge:

No sooner had they reached the other shore, than the arch began, in its usual way, to sway up and down, and with a wavy motion to approach the water. The Snake
then came on land, the Basket placed itself upon the ground, and the Snake again
drew her circle round it.\textsuperscript{78}

These occurrences are most miraculous. The bridge of light transforms back into the
snake who simply comes on land. She forms a circle. It is interesting to note that she will
now sacrifice herself:

\textbf{The old Man stooped towards her, and said: “What hast thou resolved on?”}
“To sacrifice myself rather than be sacrificed,” replied the Snake; “promise me
that thou wilt leave no stone on shore.”\textsuperscript{79}

Does her prior transformation influence her decision to sacrifice herself? Goethe’s
bridge symbol is most mysterious. The snake’s transformation is followed by her death.
Yet it seems as if she has revealed her secret to the world while saving the prince’s life,
and therefore decides to die. In terms of consciousness, she has transported all figures
into a different state of consciousness. The text states:

\textbf{The old Man promised; then addressing Lily: “Touch the Snake” said he, “with
thy left hand, and thy lover with thy right.” Lily knelt, and touched the Snake and
the Prince’s body. The latter in the instant seemed to come to life; he moved in
the Basket, nay he raised himself into a sitting posture; Lily was about to clasp
him; but the old Man held her back, and himself assisted the Youth to rise, and let
him forth from the Basket and the circle. The Prince was standing; the Canary-
bird was fluttering on his shoulder; there was life again in both of them, but the
spirit had not yet returned; the fair Youth’s eyes were open, yet he did not see, at
least he seemed to look on all without participation. Scarcely had their admiration
of this incident a little calmed, when they observed how strangely it had fared in
the meanwhile with the Snake. Her fair taper body had crumbled into thousands
and thousands of shining jewels.}\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{78} Thomas Carlyle, 38
\textsuperscript{79} Thomas Carlyle, 38
\textsuperscript{80} Thomas Carlyle, 38-39
The prince opens his eyes, but he does not yet see. His consciousness is not returned to participate in this world. Does the snake provide a new consciousness for the prince? She suddenly transforms into stones and these are then given to the river, the symbol of sub-consciousness:

The old Woman reaching at her Basket had chanced to come against the circle; and of the shape or structure of the Snake there was now nothing to be seen, only a bright ring of luminous jewels was lying in the grass. The old Man forthwith set himself to gather the stones into the Basket; a task in which his wife assisted him. They next carried the Basket to an elevated point on the bank; and here the man threw its whole lading, not without contradiction from the fair one and his wife, who would gladly have retained some part of it, down into the River. Like gleaming twinkling stars the stones floated down with the waves; and you could not say whether they lost themselves in the distance, or sank to the bottom.

By transforming into stones that float down with the river the snake takes her secret back to the realm of sub-consciousness. This is also the realm or symbol of falling into oblivion. The snake’s sacrifice is a symbol for the protective function of human consciousness. To this point the snake has guided all figures safely from one riverside to the other, that is, from one state of consciousness to the other. The bridge symbolizes the journey or connection between two different dimensions.

These dimensions can be interpreted as worldly and otherworldly, or simply as super-conscious and conscious. Important to note is that our consciousness is served by a guardian or custodian, symbolized by the ferryman. He can transport people from the

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81 Ronald D. Gray, 175:“Now the Youth is restored to life, and steps forth from the circle. The new man has been born, and from now on, the thread of the story is maintained not by the serpent, but by the progress of the Youth towards his marriage with the Lily-maiden. The Youth has taken the place of the serpent, and continues both its life and its own on a higher plane. But although the youth is now revived from death, he is not yet fully restored to life. In this he resembles, as will be seen, the alchemical homunculus. He looks about him with open eyes, but sees nothing, for ‘the spirit had not yet returned’.”
82 Thomas Carlyle, 39
conscious to the super-conscious. However, the snake’s wisdom represents the counterpart to the ferryman. She symbolizes our ability to forget.

She also symbolizes the old that passes away to favor the new. The snake cannot confront the new progress that she has initiated while still being alive. Goethe refers to evolution. Humanity and human beings will undergo major changes, as will nature.

Nature changes rapidly. This is symbolized by the snake’s voluntary self-sacrifice. By sacrificing her life, she provides a new life for the prince, symbol of transformation after yearning for completion. The snake awakens his human body as well as the little canary bird to life.

Nature’s wisdom, represented by the snake, lends new life to the human race as well as to any other living creature. To this extent, the precious stones embody her wisdom, a genetic wisdom from which new life will spring. Goethe describes nature’s wisdom now in the form of crystalline jewels that will float in the stream of oblivion until needed by evolution. This is simply a symbol for evolution that constantly creates new life forms while old forms disappear.

Summary

Goethe’s Fairy Tale illustrates in poetic pictures the processes of evolution. All dramatis personae represent different states of consciousness. The threshold experience of death or transformation as it is depicted in the symbols of the young prince, the snake, Mops, and the little canary bird lead to new forms of life. Therefore, they symbolize the
new beginning. This new beginning can only come after something has ended. This is a universal law that must still be integrated in our modern consciousness.

The snake’s enlightenment is symbolized in a sudden mental clarity or insight that is expressed through her sacrifice and therefore transforms her physical appearance. When people reach a higher state of consciousness they suddenly feel free from certain burdens: guilt, doubts, etc. This is often reflected in their physical appearance as well. They feel and look younger and more beautiful. This new level of energy, symbolized through “light in the snake’s body,” motivates her in the beginning to search for more information. She courageously starts her quest—yet—it differs from the ferryman’s journey. While he travels with his boat (belief system) over the river (emotions), her quest keeps her, by nature, on earth. She represents the horizontal unconscious nature, whereas the vertical will-o’-the-wisps stand for human consciousness.$^3$

In regard to physical characteristics of light and light’s effects on human consciousness, modern research lends to understanding universal laws. New facts about the nature of light deriving from research related to Goethe’s conception of science will finally be considered. To sum up the findings of this thesis and in addition new facts about the nature of light are discussed in the conclusion.

$^3$ Hans Endres, 11
Conclusion

The voices of the traveling stray-lights who appear in the form of two flames are a metaphor for or a symbol of the “fire” of ideas. Intellectual activity starts spontaneously. However, this energetic activity is not yet integrated into other human activities, just as the element of fire does not belong to this planet. Here, flames come from the realm of spirit, where Lily lives, to where they will also return. Myths tell us that fire was derived from the gods.

The element of fire could represent intellectual impulse that is not yet integrated into the emotional body and may also lead us astray. We do not know why we have certain ideas at certain moments. It seems they find us by surprise. It happens in dreamlike, unconscious states as is illustrated in the Fairy Tale: at midnight. In the Fairy Tale, the idealistic initiators are called “will-o-the-wisps,” symbolic flames representing consciousness beyond human ideals. The travelers have loud voices, appear in pairs, and are in a violent haste. Ideas or thoughts arrive from somewhere, often as “sound sensations,” or inner “light appearances.” Later, we communicate them through structured geometrical sound-pictures: languages. Language itself is a symbol or universal form of thought communication or idea exchange. Ideas move faster than they appear in our consciousness. Writing or brainstorming is an attempt to “catch” the ideas. The human path to knowledge is guided by the ability to communicate certain ideas. Yet, we must be aware of our ideas and of their consequences. The process of learning about oneself takes courage. Spiritual schools, such as Buddhism, Taoism, and Sufism speak of “Enlightenment” as the conscious awareness of the “nothingness” beyond every human
thought. Therefore, the ideal world consists of a paradox, that is, ideas are simply a human construct, and are not to be taken too seriously. This paradox might have found its reflection in the *Fairy Tale* as paired flames 'the will-o-the-wisps,' ideas whispering universal consciousness. However, the moment of awareness of an intellectual impulse already belongs to the so-called past. The word “past” describes just another symbol, another human creation to find a model or “container” for memory. In reality, there is no past and no future. The concept of “time flowing by” is another human creation.

In the *Fairy Tale*, Goethe depicts this imagination as the river. The river is a symbol for another element: water. The earthly element of water represents intuition and emotion, human sub-conscious capacities that connect two realms: the invisible world, and the material or visible world. The beautiful Lily lives in the first, a spiritual realm, and the prince in the second, an earthly or physical realm. Thus, the river separating these two realms represents another paradox: the above-mentioned human belief that there exists a distinction between past, present, and future.

Humans create belief systems or thought patterns to structure the world they perceive. This is demonstrated by the ferryman’s boat. The symbol of the boat equates to “human constructs” or certain models of truth. These models are necessarily limited. Unless they are very complex, they can hardly explain the universe. The ferryman is a metaphor for scientists or spiritual leaders knowing the invisible, spiritual, or abstract world. He uses his boat on a regular basis to bridge the dangerous river and reach the physical world. However, he cannot return the same way. Through human consciousness, ideas lead to creations that may enter the material world. The will-o’-the-wisps disturbingly change the ferryman’s perception of reality by shaking his boat, a

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84 Hans Endres, 5
model of reality he had created to begin with. In a material world, those changes often appear as fundamental scientific innovations.

Scientists are rewarded materialistically for their ability to communicate their progressive thoughts and ideas. The river’s fury against gold pieces demonstrates historical consequences of science being haunted by gold. Technologies lead to destruction. Glittering gold pieces, springing from the will-o’-the-wisps, may symbolize materialistic rewards for temporary human models of reality. The ferryman is very aware of the danger. He refuses certain ideas. Furthermore, he is going to hide the gold.

Devoted longing for understanding and knowledge would require consciousness. Materialistic thinking does not lead to higher consciousness. It is no answer to the misery on this planet and human suffering. Consciousness is reached and refined through contemplation. Gold pieces are a symbol for knowledge as well as any material distractions that hinder people’s ability to discriminate good from evil. The ferryman, a symbol for wisdom, spirituality, and long-term holistic thinking, remains ignored and unpaid. Gold plays an ambivalent role in Goethe’s Fairy Tale as well as in Faust Part II. It symbolizes temporary appearances. Gold is described as materialized, condensed light on earth, and so it has a certain value for human consciousness. However, shining gold does not represent the inspiration of “light” for those who want to grasp it. It may even kill them as is seen with Mops. Gold is just an earthly derivative, a material memory of light, but one that does not nurture or return to nature. It is not included in the natural cycle. Therefore, it was misused to establish power rather than wisdom. As an outstanding material, it refuses to equate itself to anything else. The ferryman insists on being paid with fruits of the earth because the earth’s ability to survive the consequences
of human ideas and innovations is our guarantee of survival. The violent, hasty intellect-flames produce gold as a by-product called knowledge. They are removed from nature, irresponsible for consequences they trigger through their haste, a metaphor for humanity’s shortsightedness. They despise fruits of the earth because, unlike the fruits, they belong to the abstract realm of thought.85

The ferryman distances himself from violent ideas brought by the will-o’-the-wisps’ inspiration. He goes into a kind of retreat by finding a place in his consciousness that is free from emotional concerns. The rocky spot symbolizes this place. He can rest, where the water, symbol of emotions, has never reached. The rocky spot symbolizes a heightened state of consciousness as well as the old man’s lamp. The old man knows when it is time to take action. He waits until his lamp (intuition) shows him the right moment. The ability to wait is a heightened state of consciousness, the state of contemplation. Meditation leads people to this state. This is safe place to free oneself from materialistic distractions. The temptation of gold can be buried there. Conscious meditation brings people “back to earth.” Yet, there is more to it than that. We can communicate ideas and thoughts to other receptive people using telepathy. To throw the gold, symbol of knowledge and ideas, into the rocky spot means that the ferryman sends a message telepathically. He hands a task over to someone else, in this case the snake.

The moment thoughts are directed into only one “path of thought,” indoctrination sets in. Indoctrination has always been the end of intellectual activity. If people are not allowed to follow and communicate their ideas freely, their capacity for ideas may cease. They may even stop thinking entirely. This is the most unpleasant feeling that Goethe describes symbolically by fastening idealistic stray-lights to the earth: energy must first flow freely before it can undergo civilization and cultivation. Yet, freedom must go hand-in-hand with personal responsibility. It must be integrated into ethical concerns. Intellectual activity must lead into the path of the heart if it does not want to create new forms of destruction. The will-o’-the-wisps engage to pay the ferryman’s humanistic demand. This demanded payment symbolizes a delay. How could they ever enter reality without his support, and how can they return to the invisible world without fulfilling their purpose? They call for him, but he is gone. Taking distance from our scientific ideas in order to think about their consequences will be a major concern for the future of this planet. Technological innovations are required to harmoniously support the fragile ecological balance of the earth.

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Only then does he return to his little cottage, symbol of everyday consciousness, from where he began his journey. The journey of the lonely wanderer can be explained as change, or the turning point that is within sight.

Here, the potential of change is signaled by the introduction of the green snake. She personifies curiosity and innocence. Unlike the ferryman, who knows too much about the ambivalence of knowledge and who is therefore caught in negative expectations, the snake does not expect new ideas at all. Her color suggests that she is emotionally and physically in harmony. According to Goethe, the color green represents a conscious state of mind. He compares the color green to life itself (Faust), whereas gray symbolizes all theory. The snake’s curious grasp of information, in this case gold, leads her to transformation. Knowledge is transformed into wisdom. She gains a new awareness of herself, yet she is still unconscious. Gold represents the missing piece of a puzzle, or, the answer to a question. Once this answer is found, it leads to self-empowerment, when all knowledge turns into truth. Goethe also indicates that this transformation is no coincidence. The will-o’-the-wisps are arrogant, serving as characteristics of intellect. However, the snake, as a symbol of nature’s wisdom, tolerates this intellectual arrogance with patience. The interrelatedness between human intelligence and nature’s wisdom is illustrated by the snake’s gratefulness. She thankfully serves human intelligence until the point of self-destruction.

Many obstacles wait along her path. We can also see such obstacles in the symbol of the ferryman, who can only cross the river in one direction. This is a symbol for the archetype that belongs to the past, and as a logical consequence it cannot reach the future
from the past. In contrast, nature’s wisdom can bridge the past with the future. The giant can create the same connection because it symbolizes the elemental forces of nature.

Usually, these elemental forces are hidden in unconsciousness. Human consciousness can bring them to daylight in order to use them constructively. Only then do they become effective. Otherwise they remain in the subconscious and, as a result, do damage. Unconscious, independent elemental forces that are not yet part of consciousness can provoke disastrous consequences. However, it is not the mistake of these forces because they derive from the invisible world and, therefore, do not know the physical world. Elementary forces are not responsible for the consequences they create for human beings and human accomplishments. I have explored the light appearances in Goethe’s Fairy Tale with regard to their symbolic meaning to human consciousness.

Finally it might be appropriate to look at the process of evolution in a larger context and say a word on Goethe’s text and how it relates to modern research in physics. The ecological crisis that we experience today requires intellectual solutions for environmental crimes. Goethe explains in his Fairy Tale that it is wrong to diabolize the intellect. Despite all limitations that are depicted in the symbol of the stray-lights, we do need the intellect. Progress, by definition, moves forward, not back. The disastrous consequences that errors of human intellect have caused in the past should not lead to wrong assumptions, such as the refusal of all positive intellectual achievements. Modern science and technology inherently characterize human civilization. It is not possible to simply step out of such developments in order to become the outsider that is represented by the symbol of the young prince in Goethe’s tale. Thinking about intellect means thinking about thought, in other words, about cognition. Arthur Zajonc, researcher of
quantum optics, talks about the recent challenge of classical forms of thought.\textsuperscript{86} This challenge leads to new modes of understanding that are now required by the facts deriving from quantum physics:

Thought, and more basic still, the process of thinking are the progenitors of our civilization. The effects of how we think work back on themselves, rigidifying and reinforcing those modalities of thought characteristic of an age and hindering new modalities. Our manner of thinking has shaped the planet and ourselves and has the power to reshape them once more. The monuments of the past speak of traditions that have sculpted not only our exterior landscape, but also an interior one as well.\textsuperscript{87}

Zajonc points out that we are the inheritors of material and cognitive monuments. In this context he mentions the development of the mechanical clock in medieval Europe around 1300. This development marked a decisive point in the evolution of the West. The clock became an image that shaped the collective imagination. The gradual perfection of the clock mechanism led to a different understanding of nature. As a result, life became ordered by the hours of the mechanical clock. It was measured and shaped by a machine. The conception of the modern world was born through Copernicus, Rene Descartes, and Galileo. The latter is recognized as the founder of the modern science that has profoundly changed the world. With Galileo began a new culture:

\textsuperscript{86} Arthur Zajonc, 313: "If we would create the capacities for understanding our future, we must dwell precisely in the tensions, paradoxes, and annoying anomalies of our time. Only thus will we develop the faculties suited to understand the nature of light and, I believe, see the way through our perilous times. We may think with Goethe that such mental powers belong to a highly evolved age, but I believe that ours is the dawn of that age. The prerequisites are there: the mandate of orthodox science to develop our imaginative capacities and the dictates of our conscience if we would avoid the technical calamities that threaten our well-being and survival. On nearly every front, we are called to reimagine the world we inhabit. It simply awaits an act of courage for us to begin and patient perseverance for us to succeed in the self-conscious education now in our hands."

\textsuperscript{87} Arthur Zajonc, 300
The strains of a different song, brilliant and strong, ring out from the technological offspring of the scientific revolution. A clockwork universe excludes human participation except as another component of its vast mechanism. The universe seems without inherent value or meaning. This part of our cognitive inheritance is more recent and more pressing. 88

Today we experience the desire for change. As its best, this desire is grounded in the scientific facts and powerful moral dilemmas of our modern world. 89 We look for objects that defy any categorization into the catalog of machines. Light is the most unambiguously non-mechanical object. In this context Fritjof Capra writes:

This property of matter and of light is very strange. It seems impossible to accept that something can be, at the same time, a particle and a wave, which is spread out over a large region of space. This contradiction gave rise to most of the koan-like paradoxes which finally led to the formulation of quantum theory. The whole development started when Max Planck discovered that the energy of heat radiation is not emitted continuously, but appears in the form of ‘energy packets’. Einstein called these energy packets ‘quanta’ and recognized them as a fundamental aspect of nature. He was bold enough to postulate that light and every other form of electromagnetic radiation can appear not only as electromagnetic waves, but also in form of these ‘quanta’. The light quanta, which gave quantum theory its name, have since been accepted as bona fide particles and are now called photons. They are particles of a special kind, however, massless and always traveling with the speed of light. 90

The idea of “quantum superposition” defies our traditional clockwork imagination. In this context Zajonc mentions the experiment in March 1987, in which he collaborated at the Max Planck Institute for Quantum Optics in Garching:

88 Arthur Zajonc, 304
89 Fritjof Capra, 61: “The first three decades of our century changed the whole situation in physics radically. Two separate developments—that of relativity theory and of atomic physics—shattered all the principle concepts of the Newtonian world view: the notion of absolute space and time, the elementary solid particles, strictly causal nature of physical phenomena, and the ideal of an objective description of nature. None of these concepts could be extended to the new domains into physics was now penetrating.”
90 Fritjof Capra, 67
This experiment dramatizes the so-called wave-particle duality of light. To understand results of the experiment, we need to establish the criteria for the recognition of particles and waves—that is, how do we know whether we have the one or the other? The standard test of a particle is indivisibility. If we can split the particle, then it might be comprised of other particles or it might be a wave. If, however, the particle is resolutely indivisible, then we can declare it unequivocally to have been a single particle. The criterion for a wave is the phenomenon of interference. That is, when two wave-trains cross, the disturbance displays very characteristic maxima and minima...With these two criteria, indivisibility and interference, we are now ready to interpret experiments that will provide the definitive answer to the question regarding the nature of light.\(^91\)

The experiment resulted in a logical impossibility. The experiment showed that light particles are indivisible, however, it also showed an unambiguous signature of interference. This bizarre scenario leads Zajonc to the following question:

Is there some way the particle could, perhaps by “sensing” the intent of the experiment, divide in the latter instance but not in the former?\(^92\)

Furthermore, he concludes that the ultimate results of this experiment are not explainable if we think classically, that is, mechanically. We confront a situation where the clarity of mathematical formalism has not translated into a clear understanding of this physical phenomena. Understanding appears to require an image. The imagination of a mechanical universe has provided science with a powerful means of understanding a large, but finite range of effects. In other words, what cannot be imagined mechanically cannot be imagined at all. Therefore, we must modify our traditional sense of what it

\(^{91}\) Arthur Zajonc, 304
\(^{92}\) Arthur Zajonc, 308
means to understand. The problem with light is not limited to the wave particle question. Zajonc continues:

There are other puzzling features of its apparent nature such as the lack of a quantum-mechanically acceptable concept of position. Electrons and similar elementary particles formally possess a clear position variable. This is not the case with light. To ask the simple question “Where?” is far more subtle for light than for matter.93

Borderline phenomena, such as “superposition of light,” cannot be embraced within the mechanical universe and will require serious attention. In this context, Zajonc mentions the discovery of superconductivity in 1911 by H. Kammerling Onnes, a promise of massive technological implementation. Macroscopic quantum effects—similar to the arcane effects of light—may literally drive the future engines of industry. In the Middle Ages, the mechanical clock freed people’s sense of time from the motions of heavens and fixed it to the rhythms of a physical instrument. With regard to the future Zajonc asks:

Could it be that the technical innovations of quantum mechanics will engender a similar revolution in thought? Will we come to imagine our universe and ourselves differently for the existence of a revolutionary, quantum technology?94

We are called to re-imagine the world we inhabit. Artists’ cognitive capacities and their struggle to create new ways of seeing and knowing have often been at odds with the science of their era. However, they are the harbingers of the future mentality required both by science and by modern civilization. Goethe’s scientific and poetic work is a good

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93 Arthur Zajonc, 309
94 Arthur Zajonc, 310
example of such mental powers that belong to a highly evolved age. He proposed that, by staying with the phenomena, varying their conditions of appearance, experimenting with them while holding the phenomena always in view, cognitive capacities would arise suited to proper understanding. Goethe called it a new organ of perception in humans. I conclude this thesis with Zajonc's words:

> With the new organs so fashioned, understand arises in what Goethe termed an “aperçu,” and “such a discovery is infinitely fruitful.” Moments such as these—whether had by Newton, Goethe, or any passionate inquiring scientist—are artistic moments.\(^\text{95}\)

\(^{95}\) Arthur Zajonc, 312
Appendices:

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (August 28, 1749 - March 22, 1832)

Biography

Nicholas Boyle starts his Goethe biography, *Volume I—The Poetry Of Desire*, discussing Goethe’s reception in Germany during Goethe’s lifetime. In this context, Boyle states that the term *Goethezeit* is seriously misleading, since Goethe was never a model to imitate. Nor was he ever the most typical figure of a particular literary movement.

Goethe...lived and lives only for a few: for most he is nothing but conceited fanfare trumpeted from time to time across German borders. Goethe—not just a good and great man, but an entire *culture*—Goethe is an episode without consequences in the history of the Germans: who for example could demonstrate one bit of Goethe in the German politics of the last seventy years! (While a bit of Schiller has certainly played its part and perhaps even a little bit of Lessing.)

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was born in Frankfurt am Main on the 28th of August, 1749, into an upper middle-class family. His parents were the Imperial Counselor Johann Kaspar Goethe (1710-1782), and the burgomaster’s daughter, Katharina Elisabeth Textor (1731-1808), a wealthy Frankfurt patrician, who was twenty-one years younger than her husband. On August 29th, Goethe was baptized as a Lutheran. Goethe’s sister, Cornelia Goethe, who later married Georg Schlosser, was born

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96 Friedrich Nietzsche, 1880 cited in Boyle 6
in 1750, and was the only sibling to survive. She died in 1777. Goethe senior, Johann, a
leisured private citizen, devoted his energies to writing memoirs of his Italian journey (in
Italian), patronizing local artists, and, above all, educating his two surviving children, the
future poet and his sister Cornelia. He was a man of wealth, education, and high social
position, who knew Latin, Greek, French, Italian, English, and Hebrew. He was also
active in the study of drawing and history.

Goethe's autobiography, *Aus meinem Leben: Dichtung und Wahrheit* ⁹⁷, recalls his
upbringing as a rather chaotic experience. Yet, for his creative mind it may have been
most stimulating. His mother invented stories in his early boyhood, and the best of
teachers were provided for him. In his early teens, he was casting his school exercises in
the form of an epistolary novel written in German, French, Italian, English, Latin, and
Yiddish, with occasional postscripts in Greek. The characters were seven brothers and
sisters, scattered in different parts of Europe. One of them writes in German, another in
English, a third in French, a fourth in Italian, a fifth in Latin, a sixth in Greek, and a
seventh in the Jewish-German dialect. At an age when most boys struggle unwillingly
with the rudiments of knowledge, Goethe had laid a broad basis for all future studies, and
grasped with passionate eagerness every opportunity to anticipate them. The youth
assimilated and immediately implemented all that he learned, and his creative power was
developed many years earlier than usual. His good looks, his precocious talent, his bright,
sparkling, lovable nature, allowed him a freedom rarely granted to children. This gave
him an independence and self-reliance which he preserved throughout his life. The young
Goethe began to compose even before he began to write. Feeling and thought were co-
existent in his life.

⁹⁷ 1811-22; trans. as *Memoirs of Goethe*, 1824
During the Seven Years War (1756-1763), Prussia established itself as a major European power, further undermining the already unstable Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. French troops occupied Frankfurt, and young Goethe enjoyed extensive opportunities to see French plays. Royal Lieutenant Marquis Thoranc, the French civilian governor and commanding officer of Frankfurt, opened his headquarters in Goethe's house, which he filled with the works of local painters. In this war, Goethe's father supported Prussia, while his grandfather was on the side Austria and France. Goethe had a good opportunity to learn French from the Royal Lieutenant and from the French theatre that had been imported. He also wrote plays in French and poems for all occasions. Before Goethe was twelve years old, he planned and partly wrote the already mentioned romance which illustrates his achievements. He soon became a hero in the youthful society of Frankfurt—a poet, an improviser and a wit, astonishing his associates with his brilliance and daring, and at the same time offending his overly respectable father.

In 1765, at the age of sixteen, he attended, at his father's insistence, the university in Leipzig, then a leading cultural center. He studied jurisprudence; but he spent more time in literature-and-drawing-classes and in informal literary activities, since he himself would have preferred the humanities. However, he met Johann Christoph Gottsched (1700-1766), a famous and ardent neoclassicist, who had taught at the university since 1730, and still determined the theater repertoire in Goethe's day. He studied with Christian Fürchtegott Gellert (1715-1769), the leading poet of the day. Neither had any significant influence on the young poet, despite his admiration for Gellert as a moralist. By the end of his second semester, Goethe devoted his energy to learning the manners of
polite society, to studying art privately with Adam F. Oeser (1717-1799), and to cultivating his talents on his own, especially in conversations with his cynical friend Ernst Wolfgang Behrisch (1738-1809), later tutor to the prince of Dessau. The writings of Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-1768), who was promulgating a new classical ideal, impressed him deeply, since Goethe's main interests in both art and literature were for the real and natural. Visiting the famous art collections in Dresden, he reacted with great enthusiasm to the Dutch school, and dutifully admired the work of the Italian school. In literature, he admired the works of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781) and Christoph Martin Wieland (1733-1813).

In 1766, he fell in love with Anna Katharina (Käthchen) Schönskopf (1746-1810), who was three years older than he. She was the daughter of a Leipzig innkeeper, who inspired him to write his earliest works, two collections of unpretentious social poems, the Buch Annette (Book for Annette), a manuscript discovered in 1895, and the Neue Lieder (New Songs, 1770). In addition, he wrote two short plays. The first play, Die Laune des Verliebten (The Wayward Lover, 1806) is a pastoral comedy in which a jealous lover is cured when he learns that he, too, can be unfaithful.

The second, Die Mitschuldigen (Fellow Culprits, 1787), is a play in which each of the four characters discovers at the end that all of the others have committed some crime equivalent to his own, so that they can all forgive one another. It is like one of William Shakespeare's (1564-1616) comedies, which for Goethe, became the embodiment of nature in literature.

In 1768, his relation to Käthchen Schönskopf came to an end, which triggered a psychic und physical breakdown in Goethe. The scornful independence towards others,
which he asserted, began to show itself in excess. Having stayed in Leipzig for three years, he was forced to return home with a hemorrhage of the lungs, severe indigestion and a tumor on the neck. More than a year was needed for his complete recovery. During his long and severe illness he was being nursed by Susanne Katharina von Klettenberg, a relative of his mother, a mystic, who introduced him to pietism and who was to serve as the model for the "schoene Seele" (beautiful soul) in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795-1796; translated as *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, 1824). They read the literature of alchemical Neoplatonists, such as Georg von Welling's *Opus Mago-Cababalisticum at Theosophicum* (1735), as well as works of Theophrast Bombast Paracelsus (1493-1541), and Basilius Valentinus (†ca.160). This was a popular activity at the time in radical pietistic circles. Together they performed alchemical experiments, which inspired him to delve further into readings in medicine. It was Susanne von Klettenberg's influence on the young Goethe that is later shown in *Das Maerchen* (*Fairy Tale*, 1795). She introduced him to a thinking that we call holistic or synchronicity. Holistic thinking respects human consciousness as well as nature's conscious activities. It determines all happenings in the tale, especially the crucial function of light.

In this context, Goethe also read the works of Shakespeare, Lessing, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). In 1771, he received a licentiate in law at Strasbourg. There, he attended lectures in history, political sciences, anatomy, surgery and chemistry. Furthermore, he came under the important influence of Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), who was five years older than him. The Sturm & Drang (Storm and Stress) era stimulated Goethe's enthusiasm for popular poetry, primitivism, recent speculation on the origins of poetry, the works of Johann Georg Hamann (1730-1788), the poems of *Ossian*
(James Macpherson, 1736-1796), a celebrated literary forgery and, above all, the novels of Henry Fielding (1707-1754), Laurence Sterne (1713-1768), and Oliver Goldsmith (1728-1774). In fact, Herder was in the avant-garde of the Storm and Stress era.

Under the liberating impact of these new influences, Goethe wrote graceful and powerful poems, which read like folksongs and which he dedicated to Frederike Brion (1752-1813), a young Alsatian woman with whom he had an intense love affair. The poems are still counted among his most popular lyrics: Mailied (May Song) and Willkommen und Abschied (Welcome and Farewell). These poems and others constitute the so-called Sesenheimer Lyrik of 1770/71. Goethe immortalized his feelings of guilt at leaving Frederike by creating the unfaithful love in Götz von Berlichingen and Faust’s suffering at the terrible example given by the torment and execution of Susanna Magareta Brandt in the Gretchen tragedy in Faust.

During the next four years he practiced law with his father and became a literary celebrity. In 1772, Goethe composed editorials for the Frankfurter Gelehrte Anzeigen on the subjects of law, rhetoric, and poetics, and he became a member of the Darmstadt Circle of Sensibles (Gemeinschaft der Heiligen). His Pseudonym was Der Wanderer (The Wanderer). His autobiography describes three emotional entanglements in this period. In Wetzlar in 1772, he met Charlotte (Lotte) Buff (1753-1828) and fell in love with her before discovering that she was engaged to Johann Georg Christian Kestner (1741-1800), who later became his friend. In 1774, his friendship with Maximiliane Euphrosine von La Roche (1756-1793) began. She was the daughter of the novelist Sophie von La Roche (1731-1807) and future mother of the poet Clemens Brentano (1778-1842). The following year, he became engaged to Anna Elisabeth (Lili) Schöneman (1758-1817), the
daughter of a wealthy banker. However, the engagement was broken off in September 1775. He immortalized both women in The Sorrows of Young Werther (Die Leiden des jungen Werther).

The Storm and Stress movement tried to free German literature from the hegemony of French neoclassicism. Goethe had already begun to work on his historical drama Götz von Berlichingen with the Iron Hand (Götz von Berlichingen mit der eisernen Hand), a play in five acts (prose) about the knight Götz von Berlichingen, whose powerful character stands in contrast to the weakness and hypocrisy of Goethe’s own age. It was published by Goethe himself in 1773, and it premiered on April 14, 1774, in Berlin as the first play of the Sturm & Drang period. In the prior year he had started to work sporadically on Faust and would continue to work on it until 1832.

In 1774, his first novel, The sorrows of Young Werther, appeared. It was an immediate success all over Europe, but banned in Leipzig for reason of immorality. Nevertheless, Goethe’s reputation was fully established.

In 1775, he began to work on an historical drama in prose, Egmont. At the same time he was invited to the court of Duke Karl Augustus of Saxe-Weimar, who was eighteen years old. There he would spend most of the remainder of his life. First, he was the duke’s personal friend and hunting companion, then he was entrusted with ministerial posts, and finally, he lived there as an artist, intellectual, and celebrity.

In 1776, he wrote beautiful and mysterious lyrics to Charlotte von Stein (1742-1827), a married woman seven years his senior, with whom he had an intense but one-sided, platonic relationship. She is generally credited with taming Goethe’s Sturm and Stress energies, which essentially led to his mature classicism. In 1779, Goethe
immortalized her in his version of the drama *Iphigenia of Tauris*, which was loosely modeled on Euripides. It was performed at the court of Saxe-Weimar with Goethe himself in the role of Orestes, before it was later rewritten in blank verse. When his sister died, in 1777, he began to work on the first version of the novel *Wilhelm Meister*, which was to occupy him intermittently for eighteen years.

In 1780 he essentially wrote another verse drama, *Torquato Tasso*, which serves as an example to illustrate the conflicts between creative men and society. Reality drives Tasso to despair, but he finds consolation in his works. In 1782, the year of his father’s death, he received a patent of nobility from Emperor, Joseph II (1765-1790), through the influence of Carl August, and was henceforth called Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.

Because of his unfortunate liaison with Charlotte von Stein, Goethe escaped to Italy (1786-88), where he recognized that his dreams of becoming an artist led to nowhere, and where he resolved to devote the rest of his life to writing. Upon his return to Weimar, years of alienation from court society would set in. Many of his friends were offended by his living with a young woman of modest background, Christiane Vulpius (1765-1816), without being married although she bore him altogether five children, of whom only the oldest, August von Goethe (1789-1830), survived. To legitimize the child, he finally married Christiane in 1806.

Between 1794 and 1805, Goethe spent much of his time in nearby Jena and developed an intense collaboration with Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller (1759-1805), who was a poet and professor of history at Jena. This union led to his most important literary achievements. Many regard it as a high point in German literature. Goethe died in Weimar at the age of eighty-two.
At the end of his life, Goethe experiences a stage production of *Faust Part I*. Yet, he did not attempt to stage the *Fairy Tale* during his lifetime. He also understood that *Faust II* was not realizable during his life but was a project of the future.
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