

is consistently modern all through the twenty-four. He may have the sensations of an ape-man when asleep, Eolithic emotions when half awake, remain in the Stone Age till he has had his bath and in the Bronze Age till after breakfast; then some hours of pragmatism and unreasoning obedience to the "modern spirit" in the broad light of day, rehearsing civilised lessons, running with his kind and bragging of the pace no matter whither, building high on unknown premises, hiding busily from death; then down the nightly scale again, Renaissance, mediæval, ancient, archaic, Palæolithic and asleep. Some may be even slower in regaining modern consciousness. My own state, for instance, till after I have had my coffee might well be that of a troglodyte and at noon I have moments of possibly mediæval reversion. We are never at the top of our powers in a crowd, and it may be that at the playhouse we drop several centuries. Certainly the pleasure is not that of seeing men go forward or an art improve, and if that is the only pleasure of "cultivated people" their every day life must be far from amusing. But that is an absurd supposition, for "cultivated people" often succumb like others to social sedatives

like the play, and even when partially awake they derive the keenest pleasure from the contrast between themselves and the sleepers.

The playhouse is as good a place to dream in as any other and the play as good a thing to wonder at, and after all a man's worst enemies are within—those twin fiends Use and Want, the devils of the advancing years, that beat the mind into insensibility. Blame should be more evenly divided between the foolish figures of the stage and the staling mind we see them with. Strangely repetitious heroes and heroines, held apart for three acts, united in the fourth, troops of identical bluff uncles and homogeneous mothers-in-law, harsh parents with hearts suddenly softened by stage mechanism, automata pulled by strings into temptation and away again, discomfited rascals, insipid ingénues, you have danced no more absurdly on the outer rim of things, been no more the slaves of little rules, than many of our most solemn opinions and several of our moral ideas and the topics of our conversation and the news of the day and the facts we have lost our way in, any time these last ten years.

## NARRATIVE AND THE FAIRY TALES

BY BRIAN HOOKER

IN TWO PARTS—PART II

V



O Cinderella goes to the ball; and this second scene is emphasised point by point through contrast with the first. The light and gorgeousness and gaiety of it are set against the chill dinginess of the lonely kitchen: the sisters that were tyrants at home are wallflowers in the palace; and the drudge of an hour before queens it over all in the natural triumph of her beauty. But the interest is not allowed

to lapse into mere contentment. Cinderella does more than enjoy herself and outshine her sisters: she captivates the Prince; and thereby a new thread is woven into the plot, to be knotted up later on. Like the Fairy Godmother, the Prince is artfully reserved until he is needed. It would have been easy, and quite in harmony with the tale, to have made him pause some morning before the cottage on his way to warfare or the hunt, and to have given Hero and Heroine a glimpse and a dream of each other, that she might have that stronger motive for wishing to go to the ball. Many a mod-

ern novelist would have jumped at such a device; and any modern playwright would have been constrained to it, in order to bring his leading man on the stage during the first act. But that, as we shall see, would have hurt the story later on; Cinderella has motive enough without it; and tradition is too wise an artist to waste its material. Meanwhile, the suspense of the Godmother's warning holds on under the fulfilment of the old interest and the awakening of the new. Cinderella has forgotten the flight of time, but the reader has not forgotten; nor is his anticipation disappointed. Her sudden flight at the first stroke of the hour, the return of her magic finery to its original forms, and her own return to rags and the chimney-corner, form a second climax in perfect opposition to the first. Here again is the same combination of truth with economy; for no imaginable arbitrary disaster would have had either the fitness or the poignancy of this. Why must the marvellous gifts be given only for a moment, to be snatched away upon a mere wanton condition? Yet that is just how things happen. And the reader is given again, not precisely what he has been made to wish for, but what he has been made to feel inevitable. Here also his interest is rearoused in the very article of its fulfilment; for Cinderella has lost her glass slipper upon the stair, and the Prince has treasured it in his breast.

The final episode is a reversal to the situation of the first; but it is a reversal with all the conditions intensified. Cinderella is thrust back among drudgeries after a tantalising taste of pleasure; she has not even the benefit of her triumph, for her sisters have not recognised her at the ball. Moreover, from desiring only ordinary enjoyment she has come to desire no less than a royal lover. And it is all more hopeless than at first, for the Fairy Godmother will certainly not interpose again. Miracles do not happen a second time, when one has flung the first away. It was at this point in her version of the fable that Charlotte Brontë, for all her genius, missed a trick: Jane Eyre should have been driven after her flight from Thornfield back under the power of the abominable Mrs. Read; and in this regard the traditional story is truer.

There is no dwelling upon the pathos of the situation, for the old tales are too simple to psychologise and too normal to wallow in unhappiness. But the concrete facts are given, and the reader's sympathy with the Heroine trusted to carry his emotion into hers. Then all the threads are swiftly knotted into one conclusion: the Prince's herald appears, the sisters fit on the slipper in vain, and Cinderella comes fully and finally into her own. A moment before, we wished Cinderella to marry the Prince, and conclusively to triumph over her sisters: we were curious as to how this might be, and as to what became of the glass slipper; and now we are satisfied in everything, and the story is done. Here is the reason why the Prince must have known Cinderella only at the ball; for otherwise he could have had obvious means of recognising her. And here is the final reason for two sisters instead of one: that the closing scene may be heightened by the triple climax. The thin, acid sister tries on the slipper, and it does not fit; then it may fit the fat, ugly one, but it doesn't; and then . . . it does fit Cinderella. A German version of this scene permits the sisters (with Gothic propriety) to try on the slipper in private; each in desperation takes a knife and cuts her foot to fit it; but in each case the overflowing blood betrays the fraud. This is interesting in its symbolism, and in showing how fiercely some Teutonic story-teller felt the need of emphasising the catastrophe; but the consensus of tradition has rightly felt that it was off the key of the narrative. In *Bluebeard*, for instance, a like device would have been eagerly retained.

Looking now at the structure of the story as a whole, we have the reader's interest aroused at the outset through sympathy with a character; then by each succeeding episode satisfied in such a way as to be continued through the very means of its satisfaction; and finally satisfied altogether: while the interest is intensified throughout, both by strengthening the threads of motive and by their convergence: and the whole structure unified and brought to bear upon the underlying idea by the economical use of materials inherent in the situation. Specifically in this instance, the reader first wants

Cinderella to go to the ball; then she goes, but he is left wondering what will happen if she overstays her time; then she overstays it, and he finds out, but meanwhile he has been made anxious that she shall marry the Prince, and curious about the glass slipper; then by the ordeal of the slipper she is chosen to marry him, and her triumph over her sisters, which has been held in suspense from the beginning, is thereby complete. The structure is like the overlapping shingles of a roof, one motive after another being brought uppermost while the next is being brought forward from beneath to be made paramount in its turn. This is the whole secret of plot-making: the intricate organism of *Les Miserables* or *The Arabian Nights* exhibits no different principle, but only the same one carried out in greater complexity. The theory of it is all in Aristotle; and the practice of it is all in *Cinderella*.

## VI

But although the art of arousing, sustaining, and satisfying interest is the same in all narrative, there are various kinds of interest to which a narrative may address itself. Thus the interest of *Cinderella* is throughout an interest of anticipation. The reader is nowhere in doubt as to the general nature of the next episode: he knows that Cinderella will get to the ball somehow, though at the cost of a miracle; he knows that she will overstay her warning; he knows that by means of the lost slipper the Prince will somehow find her out and marry her. And this is as true of the child with his mere instinctive story-sense as of the most sophisticated elder; for each episode is so handled as frankly to foreshadow the next. So that, knowing roughly what is to happen, he remains curious as to how it will happen: he wishes to realise what he has been made to anticipate. This is the interest of Tragedy, and of most high and serious fiction. We know from the first that *Œdipus* is doomed; but we wonder how he will be overthrown, and desire to behold his fall. Conversely, the interest of a story may be built up out of sheer suspense, as it is in *Bluebeard*. Here

each event is so treated as to forebode excitement vaguely, or passionately to suggest alternative solutions, for one of which the reader has an eager preference. He never knows what will happen next, and he is more and more curious to know; but with the manner of its happening he is less concerned. Here again the character of the Heroine is beautifully adapted to induce in the reader precisely the kind of sympathy which is needed. Cinderella is a creature of vivid desire and delight, incurious amid wonders; but the Heroine of this tale of suspense is the very embodiment of reckless curiosity. It is a strong motive in her marriage to Bluebeard; for his very name has a certain dark suggestiveness; he is whispered of among the gossips; and he adds to his personal charm the sinister fascination of a Lothario. She must understand this man, even if she has to marry him to find out. Then comes the gift of the keys, the ransacking of the castle, and at last the dreadful opening of the blue chamber. And then, out of the horror of that revelation, the curiosity leaps upward to a wild suspense. Will the brothers arrive in time? There is no sense of confidence in a happy outcome, such as we felt in *Cinderella*: the whole tone and structure of the story leave us in doubt; and our hearts hang upon the desperate Heroine as she shrieks to Sister Anne at the window. This is perhaps the greatest single scene in all the fairy tales; and literature is full of familiar counterparts. Rebecca is chained to the stake with the fagots piled around her; the Preceptor sits in judgment, the brotherhood gather in ring upon ring of pitiless eyes, the challenger rides ready to do battle for her death . . . and then, just as the torch is kindled, the solitary trumpet, the rumble of approaching hoofs, and Wilfrid of Ivanhoe thunders into the lists. *The Pit and the Pendulum* is another famous example. But the interest of suspense, although continually valuable, tends rather to set below the highest a narrative wholly dependent upon it; for the reader's curiosity weakens at the second reading. You cannot enjoy *The Moonstone* quite so keenly after you know how it ends. A third interest to which a narrative may address

its appeal is the interest of surprise. Here the reader is led to expect one solution while another, totally unexpected, is being prepared under his very eyes. This method is the rarest and most difficult of all, since the unexpected event must be instantly felt as more logical and satisfying than the event which has been pre-figured; and the difficulty is multiplied where the unexpected satisfies from point to point throughout the tale. This delicate art of misleading the reader without untruth and surprising him without regret is perfectly illustrated in *Beauty and the Beast*. Without pausing to analyze that most beautiful and touching of the fairy tales, it may be suggested how the Beast is made little by little more sympathetic while his physical repulsiveness is so emphasised that with the thought of Beauty's loving him comes a horror at the thought of their union; and then, at the supreme moment, he turns out to be an enchanted prince. I cannot call to mind any other illustration which is at once so artful and so great a story. The formula upon which all the novels of Stanley Weyman are constructed is superficially the same—the idea of a Hero originally repulsive to the Heroine whom she finally grows to love; but their interest is rather suspense than surprise. And the short stories of Maupassant and Bunner contain several skilful applications of the method to lesser themes—as for instance, *La Parure* and that delightful bit of comedy, *A Sisterly Scheme*. Of course no single interest is adhered to quite exclusively, even in these simple narratives: we are surprised at the Fairy Godmother, we anticipate Fatima's marriage to Bluebeard, and we are held in suspense just before the first appearance of the Beast; while in the complexity of a play or a novel all three interests are usually involved. Yet the chief appeal of the work, by which its general method is determined, is always definitely to some one of the three.

But whatever be the particular method of a story, the form and proportion of its plot remain essentially the same. There is first a period of exposition in which the reader is brought to understand sufficiently the initial situation and to sympathise with some character; then

the action begins, rising from episode to episode gradually to a climax, then falling rapidly to a conclusion. Thus the opening of *Bluebeard* is really not narrative at all, but a short essay expounding so much of the chief persons and their relations to one another as is necessary to the understanding of what follows. The true action (as in most problem-novels) begins with the marriage; rises through the gift of the keys and the opening of the blue chamber; is caught up to a climax in the Sister Anne scene; and concludes with the rescue. In *Cinderella*, as befits a story of anticipation, the interest divides over a graded series of minor climaxes instead of concentrating intensely in one; and in the surprise-story of *Beauty and the Beast* climax and conclusion are fused together. Yet in these and in all cases one outline prevails. The exposition, as we have observed in *Cinderella*, is confined to the least possible material with which the reader can follow the story: in more elaborate narratives it is often incorporated with action at the start; and the tendency is always to bring climax and conclusion as close together as may be.

## VII

Another observation of great importance is the shifting scale of Narrative. In Painting or Sculpture one scale is fixed throughout the composition: if an equestrian is carved larger than life, his horse must be larger in proportion, down to the very nails in its shoes; or if a tree is painted three feet high, the nymph beneath it must be measured in inches, and the size of every object determined by its distance from the foreground. Now the average scale of *Bluebeard* is about one to nine thousand: that is, the events of six months or so are told in half an hour. But certain points in the story, such as the Sister Anne scene, take nearly the same time to tell that they would to happen in actual life, whereas the whole time between the marriage and Bluebeard's departure is disposed of in a few sentences. The magical arraying of Cinderella for the ball, her whole sojourn there, and the trying on of the glass slipper, are narrated in about the same num-

ber of words; but the first occupied only a minute or two, the second several hours, and the third perhaps a quarter of an hour. The nearest thing to this in any other art is that license of caricature by which the heads of the figures are drawn larger than the rest; but this is felt as a license, whereas the shifting scale of Narrative is a universal convention of the art; and the writer is free to shift it as he pleases from a full-length scene to a summary so compressed that it is hardly narrative at all. There is a certain obligation nevertheless upon his choice and arrangement of scenes. The climax of *Bluebeard* must be a scene, or its suspense is lost; so must Cinderella's preparation for the ball, or what follows will be obscure; and some conversation between Beauty and the Beast must be given at length, or the conclusion will be incredible. The courtship of Bluebeard and Fatima, on the other hand, would not only have needlessly delayed the story if given in detail, but would have been extremely difficult of realisation: in summary it appears at once more proportionate and more probable; and the practice of taking the weak points for granted instead of propping them with explanations is an excellent one to follow. The reader will swallow camels in his eagerness to get on with the story, where he would strain at a gnat that delayed him with apologies for its presence. Moreover, a comparison of the stories discloses a certain convention in the placing of scenes: always at the climax, most frequently at the start of the main action, less often at the conclusion or during the rise, and only occasionally at the beginning of the tale. And this holds good for all narratives whose length does not permit full detail at every point of interest. Very little critical attention has been paid to this principle of the shifting scale in Narrative: it is so obvious as to have failed of emphasis; yet there is no principle of story-telling more frequently and mischievously disregarded. More good stories have been dulled by unnecessary fulness or weakened by the summary of *scenes à faire* than perhaps by any single fault of construction.

Of course the traditional makers of the nursery tales were themselves com-

fortably unconscious of all these principles and devices. They had never in their lives heard of structure or symbolism or economy or any other critical abstraction; but they had that natural narrative sense to which they appeal in their readers, whereby they felt the fitness of this detail or the truth of that turn to the narrative, as a painter may by seeing and drawing truly depict the whole history of a mountain without being in the least a geologist. In either case, the critic must in demonstrating the qualities of the work apply an analysis unnecessary to either its making or its appreciation. Whether the artistry of these old stories was written or read into them does not matter: it is unquestionably there. Nor has the half of it been told: I have passed over the cutting down of the beanstalk, the character of Beauty's father, the ineradicable blood-stain upon the key of the blue chamber; the meaning of the sisters' failure to recognise Cinderella at the ball, that no woman is a heroine to her family; and the treasury of suggestion latent in the single detail of the glass slipper. I have left several of the best stories wholly out of the reckoning. Yet there remains one point of their unanimous consent which I should like to bring forward in closing, tentatively as before a recalcitrant audience. To one or the other of two great human instincts all story-telling must address itself: the pleasure of wonder, and the pleasure of assent. We enjoy, not as creatures of any race or age, but simply as human beings, the story which declares to us a truth that we have ignorantly worshipped and the story which reflects for us a truth that we already understand. In these last few days of scientific enthusiasm we tend strongly toward stories of the latter sort, setting our authors to the labour of the scientist, the observation and portrayal of facts. But the tendency of all the traditional stories is the other way: the old artists cling to their visions, and leave the younger ones to their dreaming of dreams. May there not possibly be something in this testimony of the fairy tales, that wonder is greater than assent, and that the knowledge of Realism is after all less deeply human than the wisdom of Romance?

# THE MAN AT THE GUN

AN EPISODE OF THE RUSSIAN RETREAT

BY GEORGES D'ESPARBÉS



The retreat from Moscow. Disheartened bands were scattered over the icy plains. These bands filed on in silence, with their colours bowed, as if even their eagles mourned. Then the tracks through the snow were obliterated again. The last man had disappeared. No sound, no sign of life. Nothing but the stillness and the mortal cold.

But, little by little, other dark bands appeared from the same quarter, more conspicuous because less numerous, yet still more desperate. It was the extreme rear-guard, coming from Smolensk, who covered the retreat and saved the last heroes of their generation.

They passed, like shadows, with the barbarous and splendid trophies snatched from the walls of the Kremlin.

There, among this still proud soldiery, the officers could no longer be distinguished from the men. There were grenadiers dressed in all the splendour of a Byzantine emperor, and generals wrapped in sordid rags. But the eagles were still erect upon their staves.

They had just come from the battle of Krasnoë. It was evening. There were few guns left and no supplies. The vehicles were scattered. All the men were heart-sick, exhausted. So, since they could go no further, the main body of that rear-guard halted on the banks of the Dnieper and bivouacked.

Under a tent formed of many skins of the blue fox and attached to a Cossack lance, three men were emptying a helmet filled with a drink made of beet-roots. There were a little blond fellow, drummer in an infantry regiment, pale and shivering beneath his bear-skin; a grenadier dressed in China silks, and an old dragoon of the Guard, who looked like a prophet in the great damask folds of his pope's cassock, all glittering with precious stones.

They had just divided into three parts

a small piece of horse-meat, when the roar of a cannon aroused their attention.

"Where are they firing?" cried the boy. "It is an hour since we heard that sound. Can it be the Cossacks?"

"That is a French gun," answered the old soldier, he of the precious stones. "I know their voice. They are grumbling down there by the river. Boom on, you brave guns! Without them we should not be dining. The Cossacks would be upon us."

Another shot reverberated long and loud through that immense extent of ice. The three men finished their meat. Then the grenadier, rubbing his hands on his China silks:

"Now that I have eaten and drunken as I used to do at the restaurant at Montluçon, I am going to sleep."

"That is hard to do," murmured the boy, his teeth chattering. "When one goes to sleep now, he can't be sure of waking."

Another thunder-clap.

"Good! Go to sleep," said the old guardsman, listening to the echo of the shot. "I am going to stretch my legs near the artillery. Honour to their stubborn hearts! I am going to give them a word of compliment."

He went off, and walked for a quarter of an hour, growing more and more astonished at not seeing a soul on the roads. No bivouac; no gunner. Nevertheless at intervals, monotonous, regular, equal, he heard the cannon's roar.

He was near the bank. He ran toward it. But in a moment he started back, disturbed, then stupefied, then fascinated.

"Oh!" murmured he, "if I know a daring devil, there is one!"

Instead of a complete battery, there was just one gun; behind the gun, just one artilleryman.

The old guardsman kneeled down beside a gun-carriage, to see the man better, to admire him longer.

The solitary gunner, in his shirt-