Astrological Chart Indicators Illustrate the Significance of a Child's Interpretation of 'Little Red Riding Hood'

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Little Red Riding Hood by Carl Larsson 1881

Abstract

This paper is based on the premise that fairy-tales encourage children to strengthen their identity, make sense of their relationships and understand the principle of consequence of action. A case study of a play session with a child who had faced heart wrenching emotional challenges at the tender age of three, supports this premise. Lesley, without prompting, chose to identify with the character of 'Red Riding Hood' in the story of the same name and interpreted the story for her own healing in her own way. The therapist was assisted by her colleague a medical astrologer, who offered unique and invaluable insights through the astrological chart indicators as to why the child may have chosen this particular fairy-tale and why she interpreted the story as she did. The psychological symbolism of the story of Red Riding Hood is discussed from different perspectives and this has provided a platform for Lesley's particular narrative.

Key Words

Fairy-tales. Little Red Riding Hood, Astrological Chart Indicators, Creative Play Sessions, Childhood Trauma

Introduction

The two most popular versions of Red Riding Hood are the original by Perrault, and the modified version by the Brothers Grimm from 1812. Red Riding Hood is portrayed as a sweet and innocent child, on her way to take a basket of food and drink to her sick grandmother, admonished by her mother when leaving the home to not tarry and to keep to the path through

the woods. However, she meets a wolf, who deceives her into revealing the nature of her journey, encourages her to become distracted, to wander off the path and to collect some flowers. The outcome is that the wolf hurries to her grandmother's house, devours her and awaits Red Riding Hood, who is to face a similar fate. In Perrault's version both perish, whereas in Grimm's amended version a passing huntsman rescues Red Riding Hood and her grandmother.

Theme and Symbolism of Little Red Riding Hood

The theme of the story is to caution young girls to beware of strangers and the dangers of revealing information inappropriately, a need to develop discernment and critical thinking. '*The fairy tale emanates from specific struggles to humanise bestial and barbaric forces, which have terrorized our minds and communities in concrete ways, threatening to destroy free will and human compassion. The fairy tale sets out to conquer this concrete terror through metaphors.*' '(Zipes. J 1992)

According to Marie-Louise von Franz, fairy tales are the purest and simplest expression of collective unconscious psychic processes. Therefore, their value for the scientific investigation of the unconscious exceeds that of all other material. Fairy-tales represent a typical example of human beings in their simplest, barest, and most concise form. Marie-Louise von Franz believed that fairy-tales mirror the basic pattern of the psyche more clearly than myths, legends or folklore originating from a historical or cultural perspective. (Von Franz. M 2017)

In their paper, Daliah Hanah and Jonina Kaylah developed an alternative approach to understanding the meaning of Red Riding Hood. They understood fairy-tales to be examples of mental coping with regard to common family situations, that early experiences which distort mental life are gradually absorbed by the baby from its external environment. This process results in the baby's inability to differentiate between right and helpful, and wrong and harmful. Self-defense is acquired rather than being an innate quality which may become damaged as a result of mental disturbances caused by the caregivers who are supposed to protect the baby. *'As a result of this early penetration of the unprotected mental realm, the mechanism that is responsible for directing the mental life remains hidden in order to defend itself… It is possible that we are, in fact, talking about what in daily language is referred to as the 'spirit'. In other words, distortions in the ability to differentiate force this nucleus or mechanism to operate in a partial, impractical and inefficient manner.'* (Hanah D & Kaylah J 2017). The authors

state that the story of Red Riding Hood is about unawareness and a naivete which leads to an inability to correctly identify the reasons that compel us to make the choices that we make and whether or not we choose correctly.
'*Our analysis of fairy tales leads to certain conclusions, as they illustrate common and frequent mental situations originating in early childhood experiences…. …fairy-tales contain 'keys' which may operate in many other contects, e.g. works of art.*' (Hanah D & Kaylah J 2017)

Astrologer, Reda Wigle listed fairy tales with their astrological associations. The Virgo symbolism of Red Riding Hood indicates a need for developing discernment. She states that Red Riding Hood was easily distracted from the task at hand, disregarding instructions from her mother, oblivious of dangers in the environment and tasked with providing care and nourishment for the grandmother. A key component was the lack of a father figure in the Red Riding Hood story. (Wigle R. 2023)

Case Study: Lesley – 8 years old

In 2015, Lesley, a little girl of eight, was referred to the therapist for creative play sessions in an attempt to offer a safe place for her to express her feelings through imaginative play. These sessions lasted over a period of three years. In some of these sessions, Lesley created her own stories and in others she chose to re-enact the fairy-tale of Red Riding Hood, which she interpreted in her own way. The play sessions were documented.

Lesley, at the age of three years had been removed from her family home by the local authority because of her parents' drug and alcohol habit which was putting her at risk. Such a traumatic separation would have been emotionally painful and life changing for both child and parents. In later conversations with adult care givers, the therapist was told that the child's mother had been given no prior warning of the decision to take her daughter into care and she had had no time to explain to Lesley that she would have to leave and live with people she didn't know.

Following this enforced separation, Lesley's mother plummeted into despair, using drugs and alcohol to blot out the pain of what had occurred. Meanwhile, Lesley had three placements with families in short term foster care but was removed from her third placement because of suspected physical abuse of a younger child. At this time, her mother's younger half-sister (Lesley's biological aunt) was approached and agreed to offer a long-term placement, although she was single and in full time employment at the time. Lesley's aunt had the support of her adoptive mother, who had

fostered and later adopted her with her half-sister (Lesley's mother) when both children were three and four years old respectively. Lesley's grandmother had lost contact with Lesley's mother because of her continued addiction and nomadic lifestyle and hadn't seen Lesley since she was a baby. She offered to support her younger daughter by looking after Lesley on the weekends when her younger daughter was working a night shift.

When Lesley was three years and eight months old, she was given a long-term placement with her aunt. It is important to note that this was the exact age when Lesley's mother was placed in foster care together with her younger sister with Lesley's grandmother and her husband. As Swiss psychoanalyst, Carl Jung, recognised, there are no coincidences. Jung coined the term synchronicity which refers to a meaningful coincidence that happens when an inner psychological state of the mind corresponds to an event in the world i.e. where two or more events are not causally related but share a significant and meaningful connection. Over the years, Lesley and her grandmother (who had since divorced), developed a close relationship and from the age of five, Lesley stayed at her grandmother's house over the weekend on a monthly basis.

We all have a human need for closeness and proximity to others. Gordon Neufield makes the claim that '*attachment is the most significant force in the universe*.' In our current world of superficial attachments, there is a lack of emotional intimacy. Strong family attachments are required and necessary for the child to be resilient enough to cope with adversity. The care giver's primary role is that of protection. Children have an innate orientating instinct in that they are driven to know their surroundings and the environment in which they live and belong. The child is required to gain their sense of direction from somebody. It is imperative for them to discover where they are and what they should do next. They achieve this by turning towards a source of authority, contact and warmth.

At the age of three, the child is endeavouring to make sense of their world. If a secure care giver is not present in the child's life at this time, the child may feel lost and is easily disorientated. According to Gordon Neufield and Gabor Mate, when secure attachment is unavailable the child is vulnerable, unable to make sense of their environment and their perception of relationship is skewed. A consequence of this is the loss of capacity for psychological and emotional intimacy which leads to depersonalised attachment. Fear and lack of trust can inhibit a child's coping mechanisms. Emotional loss and separation bring feelings of anxiety, anger, sadness, hopelessness, loss of identity and disempowerment. Strong family

attachments enable the child to be resilient enough to cope with negative experiences.

Trauma impacts on many levels and at the time of our sessions, Lesley wore spectacles because of impaired vision. She had also been diagnosed with a conductive hearing loss which limits the vibration of sound conducted to her middle and inner ear. If severely stressed and anxious, our internal balance is disrupted producing high levels of the stress hormones adrenaline and cortisol in the body. This in turn impacts on our ability to see and hear clearly. Lesley was awaiting the insertion of grommets, a procedure where a small tube is inserted into the eardrum in order to keep the middle ear aerated for a prolonged period of time and to prevent the accumulation of fluid in the middle ear. The natural response to trauma is to recoil, an instinctive fear reaction of self- preservation**.** This can impact on our hearing and vision**.** *'The most damaging aspect of abuse is the powerlessness which results when there is no apparent means of physical escape. The response is to freeze as the mind retreats to a safe space, resulting in condition*s *such as Dissociative Identity Disorder and Attachment Disorde*r.' (Carol Lamb blog 2023).

The Impact of Stress

Between the ages of five and seven, the prefrontal cortex is only partially developed. This area of the brain regulates our thoughts, actions and emotions through connections with other regions of the brain. All of these abilities depend on proper prefrontal cortex neuronal network connections which are highly sensitive to their neurochemical environment. '*This region of the brain is most sensitive to the negative impact of stress which can cause a rapid and dramatic loss of prefrontal cognitive abilities. More prolonged stress exposure causes architectural changes in the prefrontal dendrites.'* (Arnsten FT 2009)

Beyond the physical body, the subtle energy anatomy has a structure which mirrors the vascular system and is comprised of accelerating frequencies originating from a primary source of pure light energy. The vibratory layers of accelerating frequencies correspond to sensory awareness, thought patterns and the intuitive faculties. Up to the age of seven, the child is developing their personal individuated subtle energy field (electromagnetic or auric field) which envelops and permeates their physical body and on which all life depends. The years between five and seven are critical for the positive foundation of the energetic field which reflects the development of the vibratory emotional, mental and intuitive fields, which are strengthened

incrementally. Until the age of seven the energetic maturation process is dependent on the strength and health of the energetic field of the primary care giver. The energetic resources at seven years of age will prepare the child for their future. When this process of maturation is compromised, for whatever reason, the child's physical, emotional, mental and intuitive development suffers and may be arrested at that specific developmental phase. The way children primarily learn, from birth to age seven, is through their senses. '*Before the age of seven, the brain is primarily a sensory processing machine* '(Ayres A J 1979).

Creative Play Sessions

In play sessions, it is always important to hand the locus of control to the child. Sometimes this means waiting patiently without interfering, to allow this autonomy to take place. Always believe that the child is trying to do their best within their capacity. Listen intently and be sensitive to the child's body language. Children need to be given the opportunity to process and make sense of everything that is occurring within themselves and in the environment.

Material in rainbow colours in different textures was available to create costumes for characters in the play sessions. The rays of the sun contain seven different colours and each colour vibrates at a specific frequency within the rainbow spectrum. We are able to feel the vibration of colour as well as see it. Each colour of the rainbow corresponds to a specific energy centre (chakra) within our physical body in health. Introducing rainbow coloured material in different textures offers the child an opportunity to choose the colour and material for the vibration and sensory experience he or she requires.

By offering the child a space and providing a few simple props they are able to create a character for themselves to enter their own imaginative world. This offers the child an opportunity to explore what they need to explore in their own way and at their own pace.

The adult's role is to observe, wait and listen; to only get involved and take on a role if invited to do so. It is of paramount importance that in the play situation the adult follows the lead of the child and does not try to take the story or the child's play where they feel it should go or try and hurry it to a conclusion.

Play Items

- Material of different rainbow colours and textures.
- Cardboard box of groceries
- A basket to hold shopping.
- Small Blankets
- Assortment of hats

Costume and Casting

Lesley said that she had read the story of Red Riding Hood at school. Together, we re-enacted her interpretation of the story over and over again., she never tired of it. Her story line was unprompted and spontaneous, the version according to Grimm or from a fairy-tale story book was not suggested. Lesley created the story in her own way and her narrative was always the same. In Lesley's version, she was little Red Riding Hood. She did not want to play any other character. The remaining key protagonists in the story were played by the therapist.

A swathe of vibrant red material was chosen by her and wrapped around her waist. Another length of red material became the cape. Red corresponds to the colour of the base chakra in health. The base chakra (energy hub) metabolises incoming energy and is the vehicle which allows the soul personality to operate in the physical world. It is the first chakra at the base of the spine and is of the densest and slowest vibratory rate. At the physical level it links to the kidneys and on a metaphysical level, it is associated with personal identity, sense of self and independence.

Lesley selected some groceries from the box of items provided, choosing a packet of bread rolls, chocolate biscuits a tin of soup and a carton of milk to take to her grandmother in a basket. She said that her grandmother was unwell and couldn't go shopping. There was no mention of Red Riding Hood's mother giving a warning before Red Riding Hood left home.

Lesley's Interpretation of the Story

Red Riding Hood set off through the woods on her way to her grandmother's house. Before long she met a wolf, who asked her where she was going. Not holding anything back, she told him about her grandmother, who was ill and that she was visiting her with food because she couldn't go shopping. The wolf in mock concern asked where the grandmother lived. When Red Riding Hood told the wolf that her grandmother lived on the other side of the wood, the wolf said goodbye and left in a hurry. Red Riding Hood sat down under a tree because she was hungry and had a chocolate biscuit. She then went on her way to grandmother's house. In Lesley's abbreviated version, when she arrived at grandmother's house, the wolf had already swallowed the grandmother whole in one gulp (Lesley didn't want to us to re-enact this part of the story). The wolf was lying in grandmother's bed wrapped in her blanket and a woolly hat. Red Riding Hood knocked at the pretend door. The wolf called out in a pretend voice and told Red Riding Hood to come in.

Red Riding Hood opened the door, went to her grandmother's bedroom with her basket of food and told her grandmother that she had brought her something to eat. Thinking that the grandmother was speaking in a funny voice and looked different she repeated the well-known fairy-tale phrases and received the familiar answers.

Grandmother what big ears you have.

All the better to hear you with my dear

Grandmother, what big eyes you have.

All the better to see you with my dear.

Grandmother, what big teeth you have.

All the better to eat you with my dear.

Shocked at that reply and before the wolf had time to get out of the bed, she ran as fast as she could out of the house and into the wood. She heard a hunter firing a gun. She (Red Riding Hood) quickly found him and told him what had happened to her grandmother and that the wolf was chasing her. They both hid behind a tree. waiting for the wolf to run past. As he did so, the hunter jumped out from behind the tree, and shot the wolf. With his knife he then cut the wolf open to free Red Riding Hood's grandmother who was still alive inside the wolf. Grandmother and Red Riding Hood went back to Grandmother's cottage, where they looked after each other and lived happily ever after.

Astrological Chart Indicators

The emphasis in the chart on Mercury/Virgo/and Gemini energy indicated that Lesley would have strong mental energy, which was probably scattered, and unfocussed, with too many options, leading to confused thinking. This displayed itself in Lesley's loss of focus, when, as Red Riding Hood, she decided to stop on the journey for a refreshment break with chocolate biscuits. This led to her unfortunate meeting with the wolf. Confused thinking would lead to naivety and a personality that was too trusting. In this instance, Lesley, as Red Riding Hood, naively told the wolf (a stranger) everything concerning the purpose of her journey and its destination. At school, Lesley's teachers reported that she had problems focussing and lost concentration, when she would allow herself to be distracted by her peer group which resulted in an inability to complete the task in hand. Where there is lack of secure attachment in the early years, a child will look to their peer group for support and there is an obsessive need for their acceptance in terms of values, behaviour, appearance and language.

Lesley's chart indicated self-criticism and a need to earn things in life because of a feeling of unworthiness. The trauma of separation and abandonment in her early years would exacerbate her low self-esteem and feelings of unworthiness. A work-oriented mentality was disguised by a 'laidback' 'easy going personality', in an attempt to hide the true self. Children who have problems adapting to situations may put on a 'happy face' to secure acknowledgement and to escape from feelings of vulnerability. Where there are attachment issues, the child's social and practical competence is compromised, challenges of everyday living would foster a need to retreat into a fairy-tale, fantasy world of imagination. Where there is an inability to come to terms with overwhelming feelings of sadness and disappointment and where tears are the obvious outcome and a necessary part of the recovery process, instead, the child does not cry, but will replace tears with frustration and anger to mask their deeper feelings

Imprinted memory from past incarnations can impact negatively on beliefs, perception and behaviour and may be brought into a current life for resolution and healing. In Lesley's chart, there were indications that a past life karma of being too critical of self and others had been brought forward for resolution. The chart indicated that there would be a search for perfection, whereas one needs to be aware of the impossibility of perfection and seeking improvement rather than perfection as the desired option.
Lesley had an ascendant Virgo. As mentioned earlier, Reda Wigle identified Virgo as the symbolic sign of Red Riding Hood. In astrology, a Virgo

Ascendant is associated with the perception of childhood needs not being met by parents/care givers.

By the age of eleven years, Lesley's vision and hearing had improved and she no longer required spectacles or grommets. Her chart indicated loss of trust in adults and she expressed feelings of mistrust and of being misunderstood. She was garrulous but eventually settled into secondary school and found friendships which she was able to sustain. However, her rebellious nature through her desire and need to be accepted socially by her peer group was some cause for concern. Being easily distracted, her ability to complete a task was often evident but she loved to make up her own stories and enjoyed drawing and colouring. These creative activities were of great benefit to her healing process. In her teenage years, Lesley was offered counselling to help her cope with surfacing feelings associated with the disruptions and trauma she had experienced in childhood. Supported attempts were made to reconnect Lesley with her biological mother but these were short lived and proved unsuccessful and Lesley chose to withdraw from contact. However, Lesley's adoptive grandmother, through her close relationship with Lesley and her younger daughter, had been given an opportunity to heal and to assuage the residue of guilt that remained because of the challenges faced (some of which were unresolved) in her relationship with her elder daughter, Lesley's mother.

The Benefit of Fairy-Tale Play

Fairy-tales show children ways to deal with conflicts and challenges in their own life because the character within the fairy-tales have to find solutions for whatever situations they face. As a child develops, they need encouragement and assistance at every stage. Fairy-tales help the child to recognise and internalise values and a positive shift in perception inspires confidence and impacts on their behaviour. Through fairy-tale play, the child can explore and strengthen aspects of themselves, previously unknown, represented as characters in the story. In this way, they discover their ability to problem solve and escape from different situations. Jung was very supportive of fairy-tales, stating *'I know a case in my own experience where children have been brought up in a too rationalistic way, that is, have been deprived of a proper knowledge of the fairy world and have invented fairy-tales by themselves, obviously to fill the gap left by the stupid prejudices of the adults'* - Carl Jung

By giving the child their own locus of control and not interfering with the play, the child can take the story to the conclusion that is most healing for them in terms of the difficulties they may be currently experiencing. Lesley would have issues of mistrust, lack of adequate nurturing and mothering and a need for sustained stability. When the child is able to make their own interpretation with the possibility of being protected by imagining a positive alternative, rather than the repeating a pattern of negative, weak behaviour, they are given a vestige of hope on which to build confidence and self esteem.

Children learn by acting out situations in imaginative play and hearing and seeing their own unique interpretation of the story as it unfolds. '*Fairy-tales have a moral message and can instil a positive attitude to family life.* '(Lindow J 1993). The child is helped by identifying the underlying structure of the story which enables them to acquire the important cognitive skill of making sense of their own lives. In Lesley's case, it is having the discernment to know who to trust. Where there is a lack of sense of self, the child may have spent their early years deprived of language experience. Bruno Bettelheim, Austrian psychologist saw fairy-tales as a safe place for children to tackle their inner demons. The stories marked life's rites of passage, i.e. birth, puberty, death. A '*wisdom journey'* before triumph, a lesson in self-reliance. '*The story reveals bits of human identity and we carry with us what it means to be each character.'*

In Plato's writings, fairy-tales were connected to the education of children. Old women told children symbolic stories (mythoi). In later times, Apuleius a philosopher and writer from the second century, built a fairy-tale called 'Amar and Psyche' into his novel, 'The Golden Ass'. Fairy-tales are also found in Egyptian papyri, the most famous being about two brothers Anub (Anubis) and Bata. There is information of themes and tales that go back to 25,000 BC.

Today's World

The foundation of cultural education no longer automatically includes the myths and stories on which our human and intellectual values are grounded. Children growing up may be bereft of stories because many parents no longer read to their children and although the child may be able to watch cartoons on the television, they are deprived of the warm, comforting voice of their parent reading a story at bedtime. General education today is lacking

in myths and stories in which our values are grounded. Mass media is dominated by negativity, murders and war and children lack the cognitive skills to make sense of their own lives.

A digital world of games has gained tremendous popularity with the advancement of technology which a child or young person can play out virtually. This allows children to escape into a virtual world by engaging the mental faculties. Allowing a child to choose a game according to preference and interest offers opportunities for problem solving and can improve eye-hand coordination and motor skills and reflexes. However, digital games can have a negative impact on health when played excessively and can lead to sedentary behaviour, eye strain and sleep disturbance.

Sentient Beings

Rupert Sheldrake was able to statistically demonstrate that animals communicate telepathically, although '*Committed sceptics believe that mysterious connections, unknown to science are impossible*'. Clive Backster in his book 'Primary Perception' was able to prove that plants were sentient beings that feel emotions and can respond to unspoken thoughts. A young child is sensitive and open and has no difficulty accepting that animals and plants are able to resonate with their emotions and are able to communicate and interact. Where there is a mature ego (strong sense of self) the individual is able to reflect on their thoughts and behaviours. However, this cannot happen if the individual is under extreme stress.

Magical, creative, imaginative thinking is more likely in situations of uncertainty (entropy) where there is greater opportunity for dreaming up explanations that lack evidence base. The child may then interpret the world in accordance with what they may want to be true. To do so suspends uncertainty because it promotes imaginative, creative thinking, releasing the ego's hold on a reality that may be too hard to bear.

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