The Salvaged Image:
A Study of Fairy Tale, Mervyn Peake
and the Creative Process

by

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I thank my family for their patience and generosity in giving me the time and opportunity to complete this thesis. Lastly, most of all, to my dearest husband, Adrian, thank you for all the ideas we have shared and discussed over the years.
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Synopsis

This thesis is a personal view of art as a revelatory process. It focuses on fairy tale, firstly as primordial narrative, secondly as the subject of visual illustration, by the twentieth century English artist Mervyn Peake, and thirdly in relation to my own creative work as an illustrator. In this last aspect, the thesis forms an exegesis of my illustrations for the novel *Mother Moth* by Adrian Bell.

I investigate the roots of narrative, originating with the mother-child bond. The fracture of this bond drives the human story. Fairy tale asks basic ontological questions, and children respond to its candour. Fairy tale answers in terms of the heroic, telling the hero story in its most rudimentary, narcissistic form. I identify this story as the *one* story, underlying myth and all of history, common to all cultures, including Australian indigenous culture, and identical with Joseph Campbell’s monomyth, and Robert Graves’ ‘antique story’. It repeats the self’s struggle to gain separate identity.

During a protracted childhood, the self’s struggle inaugurates repressive mechanisms of defence, first identified by Sigmund Freud. Psychological dualities arise, critically, the split of subject and object. Current neurological research supports the concept of the self’s construction as a homeostatic reference, safeguarding the organism. The self’s primary repression is mortality salience, and I argue that strategies of the heroic arise to manage this terror.

These ideas are carried into an examination of the creative life of Mervyn Peake, revealing how an artist responds to the human dilemma. I argue that Peake’s individualism originated in early exposure to conflicting cultural perspectives. As a case study of the creative process, a close analysis is made of six illustrations from Grimm’s *Household Tales*. The conclusion reconsiders the impasse of repression, and defines the creative process as a form of salvaging images, or, in an alternate metaphor paralleling Socratic method, art as maieutics.