

FAIRY TALES

Marie-Louise von Franz ('Malus') was one of Jung's most devoted followers and the Jungian most often thought of as carrying on his legacy. Her writings were extensive, but she is generally accepted by Jungians and the greatest expert on the meaning of fairy tales.

In this file we are going to look at the von Franz method for the interpretation of fairytales (and other psychological stories, of course). And also her view of where fairytales fit among myths, dreams, sagas and all the other great stories. It is very much in the mould of the classical Jungian school, but none the worse for that. And it is good NT stuff.

Fairytales have existed – often in almost unchanged forms – for 3,000 years at least (i.e. as long as written language). The basic motifs are always essentially the same, as we shall see. They have been (rightly) called neo-paganism, as they pay little or no heed of current religious beliefs, but they, in turn, are often ignored as 'unscientific' or just 'superstition – whatever these are! But they persist. And they are hugely popular when they are published. And often bowdlerized – so always read the original versions and never Walt Disney versions (or Little Golden Books). They are strong stuff, but essential for children and others. Even the brothers Grimm mixed up their material a little.

Every culture has its fairy stories, or an equivalent: stories of witches, giants and ogres, of good and bad fairies, animals and genii and a magical realm (from the dreamtime to dreams to Hollywood films) in which they all exist. The oldest recorded such stories are probably the Indian *Pachentantra* (the five books) a collection of Sanskrit fables that were used for the education of young Indian aristocrats. The *Pachentantra* reached Europe about the time of Alexander the Great.

Note the age here. Fairytales are most suited to the developmental ages of from earlyish childhood to young adulthood: adults feature, but are not usually the protagonist. In modern versions of fairy tales (e.g. in films and novels), the protagonist may be of adult age, but developmentally still a child. See also the file on archetypes in films). This may say something about our society.

After the *Pachentantra*, there were the Buddhist Jataka stories, about 2,000 years ago, various Iranian stories of djinns and peris and similar stories in Egypt as long ago as 1400BC. These were all written of course, as earlier oral tales will be long

since forgotten (?). The earliest collection of fairy stories (with other stuff) in Europe was Straparola's *Notti Piacevoli* (Venice 1550). About a hundred years later came the *Pentamerone* of Basile in Naples – said to be the best ever collection of fairytales. Many of these stories were translated into French by Charles Perrault (*Contes des Fees*) in the sixteenth century. These were popular, but much altered from the originals for that purpose (? an early Golden Book). This was followed by the carefully compiled and enormous work of the brothers Grimm, from whose stories most of our fairytales today derive.

Fairytales, then, are age-old and universal: and still popular today with children and others (especially parents watching their children develop). As education for young adults one can argue that they have – in part at least – transmogrified into fantasy stories. The themes are relatively few and also universal.

Let us now look at a well-known fairytale and its variants – simply as an example of the sort of variation that does occur.

Cinderella was a young girl who lived in perfect happiness with her mother and father. But the mother dies and the father re-married to a wicked stepmother who has two wicked (step) daughters. Often the father goes abroad at this point. Cinderella is relegated to the fireplace (hence the name) and variously ill treated. Then a ball is to be held and the prince will be present. Everyone else is to go but not cinders. At the last moment a fairy godmother arrived who equips her for the ball, with gear that includes glass slippers a coach made from a pumpkin, driven by mice etc. But – the spell will only last till midnight. She goes she enchants Prince Charming. She stays after midnight. She flees in rags, dropping a glass slipper on the way. The Prince vows to marry the girl who the slipper fits. He searches. It won't fit the ugly sisters. It fits Cinders. Marriage ensues attended by the father. The fate of the ugly stepmother and sisters varies. Paradise lost and regained (but different).

Now for the variants and symbols. Note that there are about 400 versions of the story collected from around the world.

The Hearth.

In the ashes is where Cinders finishes up in the first part of the story. She is called Aschenputtel or Ashenbrodel in Germanic versions of the story, Ashie Pattie in Scotland, and so on. Zuchinetta in Italy with reference to the pumpkin, Guidskoen (golden shoe) in Denmark, little rough-face among the Algonquin Indians etc. Obviously the lowest place in the house (it is where Odysseus sits when he arrives home before he is recognized) is the ashes-filled hearth. But yet the heart of the house – the centre of feminine energy – from which comes food, warmth and so on.

The Step-mother and Ugly Sisters.

These are not always physically ugly. They may be beautiful but morally ugly. They may kill and eat the good mother. Or the good mother may have 3 daughters and turn against the third. The stepmother/mother may try to, or even kill cinders (temporarily). There are also incest themes in some versions, which we won't bother about here as this is putting two fairytales in one basket.

Cinderella's Helpers.

There are all sorts of these. A twig planted on the mother's grave may become a magic tree that provides all her needs: or her mother's soul may live in it in the form of a dove or similar creature. Cinders may water it with her tears. The tree is a date palm in the middle east, a hazel in Celtic countries, an apple tree in France a peach in China and so on. The bird living in it may peck out the ugly sisters' eyes. Sometimes a particular animal (a cow in India, a red calf in England, a sheep in Scotland) may be killed by the uglies, at which a magic tree grows from its bones or entrails. Sometimes only Cinders can pick the fruit of the tree.

Cinderella's Tasks.

Cinders is normally given hard or impossible tasks. Making soup from a thimble of water or a few yarrow stalks. Making bread from a single grain of corn. Sorting sprouted grain from unsprouted or grain from ashes. This in addition to harsh treatment like digging the yard, cleaning the stables and so on. These are symbols of the trials and tests of the psyche as it attempts individuation. Note that she always gets help – friendly ants or dogs, for example.

Transformation and the Ball.

Here the dead or fairy godmother or the magic tree come to her aid. Perhaps with the aid of mice, rats or lizards (dwellers in dark places often associated with the underworld) as horses. The pumpkin coach may be merely a white horse and the footmen may be caterpillars. Cinders' rags may (always) cover glorious robes. Her robes may be almost any colour, or made of kingfisher feathers, be covered in jewels or be a wedding dress – whatever suits the culture and the variation about the detailed opinion of what a 'princess' should wear. The ball may be a cave ceremony (China) or a church service. There are normally three attendances at the 'ball' or three meetings with the prince before everything comes right. Midnight (or another suitable deadline) is always important – as cinders is not yet ready to make the great change. And when she has to go (from the first two meetings or ceremonies, she always leaves behind an important clue to her identity.

The glass (or crystal) slipper is present in most versions: there are innumerable mentions of glass or crystal mountains, clothes, boats, coffins, bridges and so on in

ancient mythology as having special properties – often magic powers, or a symbol of purity or insight. However, some versions have slippers or shoes of fur, gold, diamonds etc. Anyway, it is always left behind as a clue!

So much for the age, the consistency and the variability-within-a-pattern of fairytales. The question is how we should interpret them. While keeping the meaning derived as open and provisional as possible. Bearing in mind, and this is something of which von Franz is well aware, that if you interpret a fairy tale (or a myth or whatever), you do two things. You reduce its mythic and imaginal power as you change its language from mystical to psychological. But, (she contends), this is OK so long as the result 'vivifies', gives you, or us, a sense of satisfaction and reconciles our conscious and unconscious feelings about the story. A sense that one has 'cooked and eaten what one can (psychologically) 'digest'. If this happens, von Franz claims that your interpretation will be doing just what fairytales always did. The meaning in the dream has to be interpreted. She also suggests that one should always observe one's dreams after translating a story in this way, to see if they agree as well! And that more than one opinion normally adds to what one can find. I'm glad she said the last sentence: von Franz had about 60 years of experience with the subject and the average person should be a bit wary about subjectively interpreting and story with psychological content so subjectively. In my experience second opinions will always add to your interpretation.

The von Franz Approach to Analysis

Or, as she puts it, stalking meaning like a hunter stalking a stag.

n.b. this is largely from *An Introduction to the Interpretation of Fairytales*. Mainly Chapters 2 and 3. See the references at the bottom of the file.

Essentially a series of lectures given by von Franz and the Jung Institut. Von Franz is concerned to emphasize the importance of fairytales and to give a technique for their analysis in psychological terms.

Von Franz starts by saying that Fairytales (FT) are the purest and simplest expressions of the collective unconscious (CU). The bare bones of the self, as it were. They are pure, simple and concise representations. And this is, in part at least, because they lack the cultural overlays present in myths, legends and religious ideas. The huge ball of wool that is the CU can't of course be really understood, but obviously we need to make the attempt – else why should we listen to psychological stories like FTs? Her hypothesis is 'every fairy tale is a relatively closed system compounding one essential psychological meaning which is expressed in a series of symbolical pictures and events and is discoverable in these'. A thread in the ball of wool. Taken together, all the tales, songs and so on represent the self (and therefore of course individuation) as well as we can do it. The hidden self, anima,

animus, parental complexes and all the rest. Different tales for different archetypes, stories and stages.

Analysis 1.

Von Franz anticipates her technique for analysis by saying that all four functions can be used to interpret a fairy tale. Thinking for structure and the interconnections of motifs. Feeling to create a hierarchy of values (says the thinking von F), sensing to notice and amplify the symbols and intuition to see the overall, main message of the story.

Analysis 2.

She then goes onto another important point – that you musn't ever anticipate what a particular story is about. You may be correct to a greater or lesser degree, but that may not be the main point!

Finally, in your reading, von Franz gives her theory about the origin of fairy tales. That they are abstractions, taken from local sagas, condensed and crystallized and made impersonal so that they can travel round the world as a fairy tale. This sits well with her observation that the characters in fairy tales are not human. They are stereotypes without feelings. If they die, they will come back later in another form. Anyway it doesn't matter in any human way.

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A digression

The Origins and Place of Fairytales

Von Franz expresses her opinion about the commonest way in which fairy tales originate. Through the invasion of individuals by unconscious material – in a dream, vision or hallucination of an individual. An example might be *The Little Prince* of Saint Exupery (but has it become a fairy tale or did it all happen too late?). In tribal society such occurrences would be quite common and there would be plenty of mythological material handy to amplify promising incidents and build them into potential myths, FTs, whatever. Such 'invasions' also keep prevailing important stories alive.

Some people have said that FT are decayed myths or local stories. True, in the sense that they are the bare bones underneath the other – and more culture bound – stories. A

myth is national – examples Gilgamesh and Sampson. Myths decay with their culture, leaving the underlying fairy tale, perhaps (?opinions). And myths lack the general psychological characteristic of FTs. But fairy tales can also become myths or sagas if they

are made specific in relation to a particular society. Prince Charming becomes Siegfried etc. Develop. Example pp22-23.

Religious myths, more specifically, are often built into a liturgy (?OK). They will then have become part of the conscious tradition of a nation.

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But, on to fairytale interpretation. Bearing in mind that our interpretation will never be everything or exactly what is in the story. As the archetypal psychologists might say.

Analysis 3.

Look at the exposition (time and place). A sentence in the beginning that takes you to the worlds of the unconscious. E.g. 'Once upon a time, in a far kingdom' or 'A long time ago in a distant galaxy' (more modern. And at the end of the story there should be a sentence to bring you back again. Or at least Arthur vanishing into the mist leaving the relatively real Percival.

Analysis 4.

Look at the *Dramatis Personae*. Compare the beginning and the end. Example starting with a father and three sons, finish up when one marries. It's about redeeming the female principle. And so on.

Analysis 5.

What's the problem? Is the King sick? Has the mother died? Try to define it psychologically. Then follow the story through it's ups and downs as the problem is solved (or ends in disaster). What happens in the Arthurian myth? I find it very useful to look at the action in the first and last scenes to see from the beginning how it is all going to work out. So, that's the general method.

At every stage you should **amplify**. Enlarge understanding by collecting as many parallels as you can. If there is a broomstick, for example, what are all the parallels? Then you may be in a position to interpret.

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Following the statements of von Franz, you might like to look at a story that I was told by a friend in England. It was a local story, well known in the village. And it is just the sort of

story that von Franz would say might be the origins of a fairy tale, if it caught on more widely, was modified to make it more than local and corresponded powerfully enough with English culture at that time. It is from South Gloucestershire. Opinions to the website please!

The Foxham Furry Man A local saga that could become a Bluebeard fairy tale.

as told by Barney Williams

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A young woman was walking from Thither-town to the old Church by the Ford. As she came down the street between hedges of hawthorn and hazel she saw two hares a' dancing in the misty morning meadows. Then she came to the place where the streams run down from Stockham Marsh. These brooks and drains cross the road at the west end of the old camp, where once the Romans had a settlement, and now the foxes burrow and have their earths. On the other side of the water she saw a lady sitting on a basket full of withy willows. The lady had a nut in her mouth.

"Good Morning, Maam." says the young woman.

"And to you"

So the young woman hesitated to cross.

"Will you promise to let my son marry your daughter?" says the lady.

"I have no child, thanking you for your kindness"

"Well then, you have nothing to loose by promising"

"I will think before I answer."

The young woman spoke like this because she knew she would have a child before the end of summer. She had told no-one of this, not even her own mother. The lady spat the nut out of her mouth so it fell into the water and floated away, till it came to the river, and, for all I know, from the river to the sea.

"Then people will say that your daughter is good, and that she is kind, and that she is healthy and that she is gentle. But no man will say that she is beautiful" Then the lady stood up and took her basket on her shoulders, and leaping and bounding went away across the water meadows faster than a gazehound could run.

The young woman that summer had a daughter who grew up like a shining treasure. This daughter danced everywhere she walked and sang everywhere she worked, and her conversation was like music. People said she was good, people said she was kind, and healthy and gentle. But as they were poor, no man called her beautiful. So her mother taught her to cook, giving her a secret song to sing while she cooked. Everything she cooked was excellent. I know the words of that song, but I will not teach it to you, for then it would not be a secret.

One misty morning when the moon and the sun were both in the sky, the girl came down the street between hazel and hawthorn from Thithertown to the Foxes' Home. When she came to the place where the streams from Stockham Marsh cross the road she saw a fine fellow in a furry hat, and a furry coat too, and he was standing leaning on a willow wand.

"Good Morning, Sir." she said.

"And to you".

So the girl hesitated to cross.

"Will you come to me and marry me and I will give you a fine golden wedding dress?"

"I have no property, Sir"

"Well then, you have nothing to loose by marrying me"

"I will think before I answer."

She spoke like this because, though she thought him civil and would have felt no shame to have such a husband, yet she meant to ask her mother first. Then the gentleman put his wand in his belt and leaping and bounding went away across the water meadows faster than a gazehound could run.

The girl went home to her mother and told her of the fine furry fellow. Then her mother said to her "What colour were his eyes?" But the girl could not tell. So her mother taught her a secret song to sing as she sewed. Everything she sewed was as good as new. I know the words of that song, but I will not teach it to you, for then it would not be secret.

The next time that the moon was to be seen in the sky at dawn the girl came down that street between hazel and hawthorn as far as the water's spill. There he was again, in his furry hat with two peaks. He was pacing about, and with his willow wand he beat against the green rushes. In all haste he said to her "Will you come to me and marry me? I will give you a golden ring and a fine golden wedding dress?"

“I have no dowry, Sir.”

“Then you have nothing to lose by marrying me”

“I will think again before I answer”

Then he broke the wand in two and flung the pieces in the water so they floated away to the river, and, for all that I know, from the river to the sea. Then he spun himself around three times and ran off twice as fast as the King’s Messenger.

The girl went home and told her mother. Her mother listened, and said “What colour were his eyes?”

“I did not see. But, Mother, everyone calls me good, and they call me kind, and gentle and healthy, but no man has called me beautiful. I do not know what I should do for to find me a husband.” So her mother taught her a secret song to be sung when turning down bed sheets, a song that should only be sung in whispers, a song that should only be sung by a woman, and a song of only seven words. Even I do not know the words of that song, for I am not a woman.

The very next time the mist seemed like milk on the morning meadows and the moon seemed to float on the mist, she walked again the street between the hazel and hawthorn as far as the spilling waters. The Furry Gentleman was there again on the other side. This time he had a willow basket on his back with straps over his shoulders. As soon as he saw her he cried out;

“Come to me and marry me, I will give you a golden ring and a fine golden wedding dress, and I will always call you beautiful.”

Then she ran to him, splashing through the cold water of the stream, and he helped her climb up into his basket. Off he ran, with her in the basket, as quick as the wind, so it seemed he ran on top of the mist all the way to the moon. He ran till they came to his silver white cattle chewing the cud, he ran till they came to his silver white sheep grazing, he ran till they came to

the silver white gates of his house. Then he lifted her out of the basket and carried her into his kitchen and kissed her.

There were fine pots there, and fine basins, and fine moulds for making jellies. But there were only a few stalks of yarrow on the scrubbed white table? “Beautiful girl,” said the Furry Man. “Make us some soup after our journey while I go outside and take off my muddy boots”

So she put the yarrow stalks in a pot of water and set it on the stove. As it boiled she sang the secret cooking song her mother had taught her. When the Furry Man came back he was

very angry. "Do not ever sing that song again where I can hear it!" he shouted. His eyes blazed and she noticed for the first time that they looked green. However, on tasting the soup he was delighted. "This is excellent," he said. Together they drank it all. Then he lifted her in his arms and carried her into his dressing room, and kissed her.

There were fine clothes there, and a golden wedding dress for her to wear, with a clean white shift to go under it. For him there was a shirt with fine lace at the cuffs and at the collar. But she noticed that the shirt was torn, and although there were golden scissors and a golden thimble on a cushion, there was no cotton nor silk nor wool, just a few stalks of yarrow there to mend it. "Beautiful girl," said the Furry Man. "I will go out and wash myself after our journey. Put on your shift and your wedding dress. Then you must mend my shirt so that we can go to get married."

So she dressed herself carefully before sitting down to mend the shirt with the yarrow stalks. As she worked she sang the secret sewing song her mother had taught her. When the Furry Man came back he was very angry. "Do not ever sing that song again where I can hear it!" he shouted. His eyes blazed, and she saw that this time they looked red. However, on taking up the shirt to put it on he was delighted "This is as good as new," he said. Then he lifted her up in his arms and carried her into his hall.

There were lots of guests there, some standing to the left side and some to the right. At the far end of the Hall was a great bed made of gold. It seemed to the girl that the guests on the left side were all foxes, and the guests on the right side were all hares. There was a great chattering and murmuring which stopped as they came in. Then an old fox came forward with a gold ring on a cushion, and the Furry Man put it on the girl's finger. All the foxes clapped. Next an old hare came forward carrying a broom, which he placed on the floor in front of them. Holding hands the Furry Man and the girl leaped over the broom. All the hares clapped. The Furry Man bowed and quite suddenly all the guests ran away as quick as quick in all directions.

Then the Furry Man lifted her in his arms and carried her to the bed and kissed her. "I will go out and put on my night shirt," he said. "You must hang your dress up there on that peg. You can turn down the sheets and make ready. But do not put your dress in the cupboard." The girl would not disobey her new husband. She took off her dress and hung it on the peg, and stood there in her clean white shift. She looked at the bed. There were three thick soft paliasses stuffed with swansdown and three plump pillows stuffed with duck down. There were three silk sheets and three woven blankets. So she sang the secret song of seven words that can only be sung by a woman and only sung in whispers, turned down the bed covers, and climbed in.

Then the Furry Man came in wearing his nightshirt. He jumped into the bed. He sank down among the sheets of silk and the woven blankets wrapped themselves around him till he called out "Ah!" The pillows of duck down rose up, and he sank into the swansdown paliasses till he called out "Oh!" He disappeared with a last cry of "Oh my!", and though she searched earnestly she could not find her bridegroom anywhere in the depths of that golden bed.

In the morning she woke when the sun shone in. She stretched and she yawned and she remembered all that had happened. There was the golden wedding dress, but where was the Furry Man? She thought that after all she would put the dress away in the cupboard. She took it down from the peg. She opened the cupboard. There, hanging in a long line, were twelve dresses, golden dresses, wedding dresses just like hers.

She looked at the ring on her finger. For the first time she noticed that it had upon it thirteen tiny nuts. With a shiver she took it off her finger, and put it in her pocket. Then she went out to the kitchen and found the wicker basket in which she had journeyed to that house. Into the basket went the finest pots, the gold scissors and thimble, anything that was of value. "After all," she told herself. "If I am to be a widow, I will have my inheritance" Then, driving the sheep and cattle before her, she made her way back to her mother's house.

What a change! Now she was a rich widow all the local young men suddenly started saying "She is really very good, and really very kind, and really healthy, and really gentle. Besides which she is very beautiful"

So she picked the best of them, and married him. They settled at West End, and as to how they lived ever after, I leave that to you.

Well, the girl has overcome **something**. But what? This is all very like one of the Grimm brothers' nest-known stories, but brought up to date. How?

A couple of references.

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